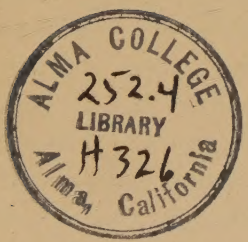
SHORT AND PRACTICAL
FUNERAL ADDRESSES

BY THE

REV. ANTHONY HAYES



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PREFACE

At funerals it will often be the desire of the priest to address a few words of comfort and encouragement to the bereaved, pointing out to them the only Source where true consolation may be found.

Moreover, these are usually occasions when some words of advice and admonition will be listened to with benefit by all those assembled.

The present volume is, for the most part, a free adaptation of an old German book by the Rev. H. Nagelschmitt. While much of this book would not be profitably employed by the preacher of the present day, and is therefore replaced here by more suitable matter, the real excellence of the work was found in its great wealth of scriptural quotations, a most appropriate and valuable feature in addresses of this kind.

It is hoped that the thought, suggestion, and argument, together with the many apt quotations from Holy Scripture, in these addresses will prove useful to the Reverend Clergy.

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SHORT AND PRACTICAL FUNERAL ADDRESSES

TWO SERMONS

By St. John Chrysostom

I

But some man will say: How do the dead rise again? or with what manner of body shall they come? (1. Cor. XV, 35.)

Having demonstrated the future resurrection, St. John Chrysostom answers the objections of grief-stricken mourners, and states the reasons that should console us in bereavement.

Being destined to enjoy such great possessions, let us keep them in mind, let us not weep for those that die, but only for those who die in sin. Remember the tiller of the soil. He does not bewail the destruction of the seed; on the contrary, he is afraid lest it remain unchanged in the soil; the destruction of the seed is welcome to his heart, for it means that the plant will arise. Thus, let us be glad when the frail body of man collapses, when it is sown in the deep earth. The Apostle says, to bury is to sow; for, truly, this is the better sowing. The birth of man is followed by toil, peril, hardship, and destruction; but death is followed, if we have lived a good life, by reward and by the crown of victory. Birth is the beginning of perishableness, but death is the beginning of imperishableness, incorruption, immortality, and invaluable possessions. There it is concupiscence, but here the Almighty Word from heaven, that calls to life. And he who rises from a good death does not begin another troublesome life, but a life that knows not pain, nor sorrow, nor lamentation. If you then seek aid and protection, as hitherto afforded you by the deceased, then weep no more, but trust

in the Protector, Defender, Keeper, and Benefactor of us all — in God, our invincible Guardian, ever ready to help, our Shelter and Protection, always and everywhere.

You say, "The friendship of the deceased was sweet and precious to me." I well know what that means. But let reason master your violent grief; consider who He is that took him away, and if you bear your affliction with fortitude, and humbly bring this sacrifice unto God, then you will lay this storm, and wise thought will do at once for you what otherwise is left for time to heal. Remember, if you should lack this fortitude, the mastering of your grief worked by time will bear no merit to you.

In addition to these reasons, recall the examples from the present life cited in Holy Writ. Recall Abraham, ready to sacrifice his son, without a tear, without a word of complaint. You may say this was a saint, called for high things. Yes, and you are called for even higher things. True, Job did weep, moved by a father's love and tenderness for his departed children. But we are proving ourselves inimical to the best interest of our beloved. If you would complain and lament at seeing your friend taken to the palace of the King to be crowned, I should not consider you his well-wisher, but his enemy and antagonist.

You say, "I do not weep for him, but for myself!" But this proves not love, if you demand of your friend that, at the moment when the safe harbour and the crown are in his sight, he should be anxious for you and troubled because of your future. "But I do not know whither he has gone!" It is proper to hope that he died in the grace of God. "I weep for him because he may have died in sin!" If this is the reason you are weeping for the dead, you should come to his succour as best you can, not by weeping, but by prayer and supplication, by alms and good works. These things

are done with good reason; not without good purpose do we, in celebrating the divine mysteries, commemorate the deceased, and pray for him to the Lamb, who is present upon the altar and removes the sins of the world; we do this that the deceased may receive mitigation. Not in vain does the priest proclaim, in solemnizing the great mysteries of the altar: "For all those who expired in Christ, and for those who commemorate them." This would not be said if there were no commemoration of the dead; for we practise no deception, and what we do is done by command of the Holy Ghost.

Let us, therefore, hasten to his succour and remember him in our prayer. If Job's sacrifice was an atonement for his children, why do you doubt that our sacrifice will bring relief to the deceased? It is God's way to be merciful to one for the sake of the other, and St. Paul says: "that for this gift obtained for us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many in our behalf" (2. Cor. I, 11).

Hence, let us not neglect to help the deceased by praying for them, because we behold before our eyes the Sacrifice of Atonement for the whole world. Hence, we may pray confidently for the whole world, and remember the deceased, together with the martyred saints, the confessors, and bishops. For we are all one body, though some members are of greater merit than others. And it is possible that we may secure their full pardon by our prayers and sacrifices, and by the suffrage of those whose names we couple with the persons we pray for.

Why, then, those tears, why this lamenting, if we may secure for the deceased the grace of pardon? "I weep because I am forsaken and have lost my support!" This you must never say. You have not lost God, and as long as you have God, He will be more to you than a husband, a father, a son, or a mother. It was God who did all things

they did while they were alive. Remember this, and proclaim with David: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" (Ps. XXVI, 1). Say unto God: "Thou art the Father of the orphans, and the Protector of the widows!" Look to Him for protection; His help will be vouchsafed when needed.

"I have lost my son!" You must not say "lost": he is not dead, he slumbers; a temporary absence, not a loss, a journey from the worse to the better. Hence, rather than offend God, try to appease Him, try to obtain His mercy. In bearing your affliction with fortitude, you both will find relief — you and the deceased. Say with holy Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away." Job did not say: "I would rather not have had children," no, he worshipped the Lord, and praising Him he said: "As it hath pleased the Lord, so be it done; blessed be the name of the Lord." He silenced the complaints of his wife by the admirable words: "Since we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not accept the visitation He sends us in His wisdom?" Thy child was taken away, not by human hands, not by an enemy or traitor, but by God, who created him, who cares more for him than you do, who knows what is for his best.

Such must be your thoughts when mourning. You must thank God for all things. If we accept this view, we shall obtain in this life peace of mind and, in the life to come, the eternal crown, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

II

St. John Chrysostom points out that in our adversities we may become like unto the Martyrs, and tells what our sentiments should be at the death of our beloved.

Do not let us lose courage in our adversity. He who gives way to concupiscence, and sleeps the sleep of the laggard, and seeks an indolent and luxurious life, has nothing in common with Christ. Near to Him is he only who realizes that he lives in probation and temptation, and who walks the straight and narrow path. Christ, too, suffered deprivation, and He said: "The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Hence, be comforted if you are in distress, consider whose companion you will become, how you will be purified by the visitation, and what you will gain by it. Nothing is more disastrous to man than to offend God; if no offence be given to God, then no tribulation, no persecution, no disaster, need cause the mind any sorrow. Sorrow, no matter how great, will soon be overcome by a good conscience, like a spark of fire by water. St. Paul was ever joyful because he steadfastly trusted in God. Great as his sufferings were, he hardly seemed to feel them. Of course, being human, he was sensitive to pain, but it could not cast him down. Thus Abraham, the great patriarch, rejoiced despite his many afflictions. He was made to forsake his own country, and go on a long and weary journey into a foreign land, where he did not call a foot of land his own. Famine forced him to go from there again; then he lost his wife, there followed other adversities and dangers, and then came the hardest of all trials, the command to sacrifice his only son. Do not think that he did not suffer

because he readily obeyed God. No matter how pious and God-fearing, he was still a human being and could not deny nature. Yet nothing could down his courage; he stood his ground like a valiant warrior, and he remained victorious in every temptation.

Equally of good cheer was St. Paul, rejoicing amidst the many temptations which surrounded him day by day. While he who is of that cheer cannot be sorely distressed by any tribulation, those who do not know this cheer are easily overwhelmed by affliction. They are like warriors badly armoured, they are easily wounded and vanquished. A better protection than any armour is the trust in God. A man who rejoices in God cannot be disheartened, he will not lose courage, he will bear everything with fortitude. Physical pain is a great affliction; yet — and this is of great comfort to know — through the rejoicing in God pain becomes bearable, even a cause for joy. The martyr, with hardly a breath left in him, is full of inexpressible joy. You may say the time of martyrs has passed. Yet there is no lack of occasion for martyrdom; the rack does not make the martyr, else Job would not be deserving of the martyr's crown. Yet I say he is the peer of any martyr. He suffered for his faith in God before there was the law and the grace, he suffered for months, and all his terrible afflictions came to him at once. Every single one of them was nigh unbearable. The loss of his possessions was the least of his misfortunes. True, some people would rather undergo the worst than to forfeit their possessions, and many may look upon this loss as the greatest.

It is martyrdom if we bear our loss with fortitude. And how may we bear loss with fortitude? If we learn that, by giving thanks to the Lord, we gain more than we have lost. If, instead of being cast down by the loss, we say, Praise be to the Lord! If you would distribute all your possessions

among the poor, you would not gain as much merit as by this one word of self-sacrifice. And this applies also to the loss of children. If, seeing your son dying, you thank God for even the afflictions He sends you, you will be rewarded for it no less than the Patriarch, who brought his son upon the mountain to offer his death to God. It is true, Abraham was fortified by the thought of doing a great deed, he was encouraged by the Voice from heaven. It is admitted that it takes great mental strength to see one's only son, who has held out greatest promise, lie there dead, and to bear this loss in resignation. He who then can say: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away," he will deserve to be praised together with Abraham and Job. Abraham and Job were, like you, of flesh and blood, yet they did not lament, though both lived long before our law and grace and our consoling doctrines. Your son has been removed to a better land, to a more magnificent dwelling; you have not lost your son, he was brought into safety. Do not say, "I am a father no longer"; behold, your son is still living! You did not lose him, you are the more certain of him now. You are called father not here only, but also in heaven; you are a father, not of a mortal but of an immortal son, of a valiant warrior, who everlastingly dwelleth in the palace. Do not think that you have lost him because he is no longer with you. This corpse is not your son; he has left his earthly mansion and risen to glorious heights. If this sight fills you with pain, then say unto yourself: "This is a vestment he has taken off to put on a more brilliant one; it is a house torn down to rebuild more magnificently." Do not say: "He is gone, he is no more" — this is the talk of infidels — but say: "He sleeps, he will rise again; he has departed for a far-off country, but he will return with the King!" "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them who slept with Jesus, will God bring

with Him" (1. Thess. IV, 13). Hence, if you seek your son, seek him where the King abides and His host of angels — not in the grave, not on this earth. Since he has risen to such heights above, do not yourself cleave to the lowly earth. If we meditate in this way, we shall banish all sorrow. The God of Mercy and of all Comfort may console all our hearts — those stricken with grief over bereavement and those saddened by other afflictions. God grant that, free from sadness, we may enjoy the cheer of heaven, and obtain its eternal possession, which I wish you all by the Grace of Our Lord. Amen.

III

THE FIRST BURIAL OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR

For all you are the children of light, and children of day . . . therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober (1. Thess. VI, 5, 6).

On the very first day of the new Church year the bells have announced a funeral, the opening of a new year of grace is accompanied by the opening of a grave, affliction has made its entry into a family of our congregation, Advent has there verily become a time for mourning.

Sad as it is to begin a new time of grace in bereavement, it is just the time of Advent that offers much comfort to those weeping at a grave. They are especially moved to realize how blessed we are through Christ's coming into the world, how sorrow softens the hearts, and prepares them to welcome the Lord of Grace upon His advent on earth, to become one with Him in faith, and to be cheered by His comfort.

"For all you are the children of light," says the Apostle, "and children of the day . . . therefore let us not sleep, as others do: but let us watch and be sober." He means to say: You are walking in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and you are faithful; do not therefore pass your life unmindful of the Lord's advent for judgment, but keep a careful and sober eye for the salvation of your soul, examine your conscience to see whether you may without fear welcome the Lord.

1. The Lord is the King, His kingdom extends over earth and heaven — here the militant, there the triumphant Church;

and through death he promotes those of the militant Church to become members of the triumphant Church. Death thus loses its terror for the faithful; it becomes the messenger which leads us to the heavenly union with our Lord and King. During the now beginning ecclesiastical year many a one will be called by death. You and I may belong to the ripe sheaves that will be gathered into the eternal barn.

Shall we be fearful? No reason for it if we remain children of light, and walk according to the precepts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, if we endeavor to live and to die in the love of God. Be of good cheer and rejoice, you children of light, you righteous, because the Lord is still summoning new members into the Church triumphant, where there are no longer times of mourning, where we shall be with the Lord Himself, to see Him face to face, to sing songs of praise with the angels, and worship Him, in union with all the blessed.

2. In advance of His coming the Lord sends His messengers; He desires to find us prepared. His messengers of old were the Prophets; John the Baptist was His herald who prepared the way. His messenger is also the Angel of Death. Thus it was with the widow of Nain, with the sisters at Bethany, and so it is with you, my brethren. But do not feel sad, sorrow leads to the Saviour, it opens to Him the doors of our hearts; sorrow more often paves the way for the Lord than the days of happiness. He desires to enter your hearts, He stands at the threshold and knocks, He desires to replace the departed one. He begs you to open the door of your heart by sincere penance, by a fervent desire for union with Him in the Most Holy Eucharist, by confiding yourself to His wise leadership, and by seeking His merciful comfort in your bereavement. You will not seek His help in vain, He will come, and His grace, aid, and comfort will come with Him.

3. This applies to us all, whom He has led to this grave to remind us of our own death, of the end of our pilgrimage. Once He came down upon earth in lowliness, to redeem the world; one day He will return in splendour, to judge the world; it will be His second advent. Are we thinking of it, preparing for it? We are standing at the first grave dug in a new period of grace. As sure as the grave has opened for our departed brother, it will open one day for us, and our grave will mark the trumpet call for the day of judgment. We are still given a reprieve, to do penance, to reform our ways, and it may be for us the eleventh hour. The Lord gives us in this funeral the warning: "Be awake, be ready, lest I find you asleep when I shall come." Hence, "let us watch and be sober: and in doing good, let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9).

Whether our departed brother has entered the reward, or whether he has been remanded to purgatory to be cleansed from minor blemishes, this we cannot know, this God alone knows. But we can pray for the dead in the spirit of love, that he may soon attain the contemplation of God, if on account of human weakness he is now in purgatory. Let us pray.[1]

[1] Prayers suitable for the occasion will be found in "OREMUS, the priest's handbook of *English* prayers, for Church services and special occasions."

IV

THE LORD IS NIGH. (Advent)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. . . . The Lord is nigh (Phil. IV, 5).

A call for rejoicing must be welcome, especially from the lips of an Apostle. But does such a call fit the hour when we are standing at the grave of a beloved husband and father, with our hearts bowed down by sorrow? Who can rejoice when the eyes are filled with the tears of bitter bereavement? And yet it is just you who are bidden to rejoice, and with good reason, for the Apostle bids us rejoice because "The Lord is nigh." This indeed is comfort at the grave of a beloved departed.

1. Rejoice, for the Lord with His blessedness is nigh the departed souls. Nay, more, they are not merely near the Lord and His blessedness, the Lord has already given them blessedness in abundance, they *are* in blessedness. Of course, we are aware with sadness that not all the deceased are blessed. St. John says: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord" (Apoc. XIV, 13), and to die in the Lord, you must have lived in the Lord. Now we may hope, with good reason, that the deceased whom you mourn is now among the blessed, because Christ has been his life, because he believed in the Son of God, and proved this belief by a God-fearing life; because, during his sickness, he entered into union with the Saviour through the Holy Sacraments, having done this frequently also in the days of his health; and shortly before his death he received the Sacrament instituted by the Saviour

expressly for the comfort of the faithful sick, and he died resigned to God's holy will. Since we may assume that this departed is blessed, and since your heart believes in the future blessedness, to him indeed present blessedness, how can you be mournful and bewail his fate? If he were to see your tears, and could talk to you, he would say: Oh my beloved ones, do not weep for me, for I am inexpressibly happy; rejoice rather in my blessedness.

2. Indeed, let us rejoice, not only for the sake of the deceased, but for our own sake, for the Lord is nigh, to comfort you who are mourning. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. V, 5). Thus spoke the Lord in His days on earth, and He proved His words by deeds. Those He met mourning and weeping He comforted by word and deed, and what He did in those days He is doing now to a far greater extent from heaven. In His gospel He has left us sweet comfort, and He bequeathed to us His holy Spirit, the Spirit of comfort, hence called the *Comforter*. Make place for this holy Comforter in your heart, and you will feel that your beloved Saviour is nigh. The words which I am saying now, in the name of the Comforter of mourners, should help to bring to you the comfort which you need so much in your bereavement. Hence, I exhort you, with the Apostle, "be not sorrowful, even as others, who have no hope." You indeed have hope, the hope of meeting your beloved one in the life beyond.

3. Rejoice, brethren, for the Lord is nigh with aid and protection for you, the orphaned. The true reason for your sorrow is that henceforth you will pursue your earthly pilgrimage without the beloved departed, without his companionship, that has been so great a blessing for you. Consider, however, that everything he gave you, he gave through the Lord, without whom we all are helpless and unable of

achievement. But the Lord did not die with him, He is the living God, and He is with you, and He will take the place of the deceased toward you, if you remain faithful to the Lord. If you flee from sin, obey His commands, confide in Him, and pray to Him in humility, He will be nigh to you always, until He shall receive you, too, into His kingdom. Now let us all join in prayer that the departed may soon be admitted to the Kingdom of God, if on account of minor blemishes he is still retained in purgatory.

V

LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE BLESSED NATIVITY
(Christmas Time)

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them who were under the law; that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. IV, 4, 5).

Dear Brethren: Many people there are who do not look upon life as a gift of God, on the right use of which is depending our entire weal and woe, temporal as well as eternal: indeed they look upon life as a burden, having in mind the numerous sufferings and adversities, defects and infirmities, afflictions and sorrows, that happen in human life. Others see in life only the opportunity to gratify the desires of their lower nature, to indulge in the joys and pleasures of the world; hence, theirs is the maxim: Let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we shall die! In a wholly different light, a light of splendour, does life appear to us in the brightness reflected by the Son of God, whose birthday we have celebrated these days. In this light we see our life as a gift of the grace of God, for which we thank Him. We rejoice in our life, because it is a source of blessing if we make use of it as the seed time for eternity. In this life of suffering we look forward to another life of glory. Here, at the grave of a pilgrim, who has finished his earthly journey, let us, who are still on our journey, contemplate our life, starting with the words of St. Paul: "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son that He might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons."

1. "When the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son." By these words the Apostle indicates that our Lord came to earth at the most fitting and proper time, and this reminds us that divine Providence wisely arranges all things, including our own earthly time of life.

It is God who fixes the day of our birth, who gives us parents to care for us in His stead; He it is, who maps out and leads our course through life, who allots to us wealth or poverty, joy or sorrow, according to His wise judgment, and who, finally, decrees the end of our life.

"The days of man are short," said pious Job, "and the number of months is with Thee: Thou hast appointed his bounds which cannot be passed." "What needeth a man to seek things that are above him," we read elsewhere in Scripture, "whereas he knoweth not what is profitable for him in his life, in all the days of his pilgrimage, and the time that passeth like a shadow?" (Eccl. VII, 5). "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God. Wisdom and discipline and the knowledge of the law are with God: love and the ways of good things are with Him" (Wisd. XI, 14, 15). Therefore, it behooves us to trust everything to His care, and not to complain or resent if He sends us sorrow and afflictions, or if He calls away a beloved member of our family. "Commit thy way to the Lord and trust in Him, and He will do it" (Ps. XXXVI, 5).

2. "God sent His Son, that He might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons." The Apostle therewith indicates our redemption as the object of our Lord's Incarnation.

To participate in this redemption is the purpose of our life. We are here, not to gather riches, that cannot make us happy, and which we have to leave behind us in death; not to win honour and influence in this world; not to indulge in the

pleasures craved by the lustful heart; we are here to recognize God, to love and to serve Him, and thereby to attain eternal beatitude, which the Saviour has made possible to us by His Incarnation, by His suffering and death. "For," says the Apostle, "you have your fruit unto sanctification and the end everlasting" (Rom. VI, 21). And our Saviour said: "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. XVI, 26). What good, indeed, is it to us, if we have riches, honours, and pleasures, but miss our vocation, and go after death to hell instead of to heaven? Therefore St. Peter admonishes us urgently: "Wherefore, brethren, labour the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election. For doing these things, you shall not sin at any time, for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2. Pet. II, 10, 11).

We are all called to be the heirs of this kingdom, because we become God's adopted children by Holy Baptism.

Strengthened by the grace of Jesus Christ, let us be good children, who honour and love their Father, our God, and obediently do His bidding, and He will receive us after death into His everlasting kingdom. "If sons, heirs also," says the Apostle, "heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. VIII, 17).

We all hope that our brother has entered into the possession of this inheritance, because he has lived a righteous life and has died a good death. Upon this inheritance of heaven is centered the hope of all of us. Let us endeavour to flee sin and to exercise virtue, lest this hope be confounded. Now let us say a prayer for the deceased, etc.

VI

DEATH IN THE LIGHT OF THE BLESSED NATIVITY

(Christmas Time)

Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, Oh Lord, according to thy word in peace, because my eyes have seen thy salvation (Luke II, 29, 30).

The word of the Prophet Amos, "And I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation" (VIII, 10), has been fulfilled in our midst: a house of happiness has become a house of mourning, its cheer has given way to lament, the joyous celebration of our Lord's birthday has turned into a wake for a beloved departed, and the festive spirit in the hearts of all of us has been clouded. The words of the Prophet may be applied to us all, but chiefly to you who are most intimately affected by this death. Your feasts have been turned into mourning — not only the present feast, but even on future ones, when others burst forth into gladsome song, you will be silent in tears. Your wounded hearts will take a long time to heal, and whenever the feast of Christmas returns, you will be saddened, recalling the loss you suffered on this feast. Nevertheless, Christmas holds out its comfort even to you, who are so sorely tried. The pious Simeon had hoped and waited for a long time for the Saviour of the World to be born, and when he saw his hopes fulfilled, at the presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple, his thoughts turned to his death and he exclaimed: "Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, Oh Lord, according to Thy word in peace: because my eyes have seen Thy salvation." He calls death being dismissed in peace, since he had seen the birth

of the Saviour. We, too, dear brethren, must get our proper view of death in the light of the Saviour's birth.

1. Death seems deprived of its terror at Christmas time. Simeon recognized his Saviour in the frail Child in his arms, and then cheerfully welcomed death. Behold, what influence the belief in the Saviour has upon the aspect of death! The Saviour saved us from the evil of death, from perdition, and from the fear of death. Hence, those who believe in Christ, die an easy death. It seems an exalting thought to die on Christmas. At the very moment when the chimes are ringing out the "Glory be to God," when people sing joyful carols, at that moment to join the blessed community of the just and to see the God Incarnate, whom Christianity is worshipping in the Child in the manger, in His full glory, sitting at the right hand of God. Since the Father has sent the Son to save us, we are the more deserving of punishment if we reject this Saviour. The Incarnation of the Son of God is a miracle of divine grace and love, hence God expects us to appreciate this great wonder of His love, to let it induce our hearts to reform. This fact has been realized by the deceased, for he turned to the Lord in sincere penance, he found in the Holy Sacraments the pardon for his sins, and grace and salvation.

In the light of Christmas the parting from those dear to us while no doubt painful, also has its consolation. No other feast emphasizes the happiness of the family tie as does Christmas, when all hearts are devoted to works of love and of charity: to lose at this time by death a member of the family makes the shock the more severe. At Christmas time there is cheer among the rich and the poor, hence it is all the harder to think of parting from one's beloved just at this time. But death knows no pity, it knows no respite. While the parting by death at this time seems harder than at any

other time, yet Christmas time also holds out special consolation for the mourners.

To save the world from perdition God sent His only begotten Son, and did not deem this too great a sacrifice to redeem mankind from the death of sin, and, loving mankind to this extent, will He not also take pity on those that mourn? God's only Son having become man for love of us, suffering untold agony and an ignominious death for our sake, is it not plain that He is only too willing to help us carry our burden, to give us comfort in our affliction? This hope dwells in our hearts especially on this great feast, and it soothes the pain and the sorrow caused by the hand of death.

Death halts for no feast, it may overcome us any day, hence let us ever be prepared for it, lest death cast us into perdition. Let us be free from sin always, let us obey God's commandments, do faithfully our duties, in short, let us live a righteous life, such as we shall wish to have lived when death draws nigh; that we may say with Simeon: "Lord, now dismiss thy servant in peace." Let us pray, etc.

VII

A GLANCE AT THE BURIAL RECORD (End of Year)

Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments (Apoc. XVI, 15).

Who would have thought, dear brethren, at the beginning of this year, that we should bury our sister so soon, her who had always been so full of vigour and health? And yet death came quickly, after only a brief illness. Her remains were to be the last ones buried this year.

Of those who died this year, probably only a small number, if any, had a thought that this might be their last year on earth. If we glance at the year's death-roll, we find, among those who have completed their earthly pilgrimage, children who at a tender age were taken from their parents, young men and young women who fell a prey to death in the bloom of life, men and women who had to part from wife, husband, and from their children, old men and old women who went to rest after a long and wearisome journey. Death has no regard for age or position: whether a man is needed or not makes no difference to death. There die masters and subordinates, professional men, merchants, tradespeople, workingmen, farmhands, married and single people. Some who in a lingering illness were enabled to prepare for the end by receiving often the holy Sacraments and to do penance by patient submission to their affliction; others died suddenly or after a brief illness, and had hardly time to receive the last rites; indeed, some died before they could receive the last Sacraments. Thus we see fulfilled the word of the Prophet: "One man dieth strong and hale and rich and happy. His

bowels are full of fat and his bones are moistened with marrow. But another dieth in bitterness of soul without any riches" (Job XXI, 23, 24).

None is safe from death. It takes the child from the loving arms of its mother, it strikes down the promising youth and the mature man; it parts husband and wife, brother and sister, children and parents, comrades and friends. Its coming is uncertain. Many of those who died this year thought their death far away, and, behold, it stood on the threshold. Hence it is written: "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments" (Apoc. XVI, 15). This means, Blessed is he who watches, lest he be surprised by death when unprepared. Blessed is he who has prepared himself for death by a righteous life, for we read: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours: for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13). If some of them that died this year could return to life, what would they do? Would they continue their old life? Would they persist in gratifying their vanity and senses, or, mindful and not knowing their hour, would they rather aim first of all at deserving the Kingdom and Justice of God, by leading a life of penance and by walking the path of God's commandments?

Dear brethren, let us do now what we shall wish at the hour of our death we had done. Let us atone for our sins, let us forgive our enemies, let us practise good deeds. We do not know whether we are to die next year; but one thing we do know: if we die in the grace and love of God, we shall die a blessed death and inherit the kingdom of God: but if we should die unrepentant in our sins, we shall die a wretched death, and be lost for all eternity.

Let us now give thought to our departed sister and all the other dead of the year. Pray for all of them, and

endeavour to lead in the new year an unblemished life, so that, when the time comes to enter your names in the burial record, we may have reason to hope that the Almighty has entered your name also in the book of eternal life. Let us pray.

VIII

AT THE THRESHOLD OF ETERNITY. (New Year's)

This, our first funeral in the new year, is to be the funeral of a robust young man, who hardly gave a thought to the possibility of being the first one called away in the new year. But who is there among us who knows whether or not this year will be his last on earth? We are all standing at the threshold of eternity, without knowing what sickness, what accident, is to throw open the gate for us, nor at what hour. Oh, you, who day after day are thinking of new pleasures and enjoyments, unmindful of your eternal destination, if you would consider that you stand at the gate of eternity every day, every hour, every minute; that you will enter by this gate, either to eternal joy or to eternal misery.

And you, also, whose paths are beset with trouble and hardship, you, who day after day are groaning under the burden of toil and care, do you give thought to the fact that you stand at the gate of eternity? Pain and sorrow can last but a short time, and the more patiently for God's sake you bear your suffering, the greater will be your claim upon eternal reward.

Yonder all pain, worriment, and toil ceases; there you shall enjoy eternal rest, peace, joy, and beatitude, provided you have followed the lofty example of our Redeemer, by taking up and carrying your cross in submission to God's holy will. Hence, you should frequently call to mind the words of the Apostle: "For I reckon, that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. VIII, 18).

And there you are day after day labouring by the sweat of your brow to amass as many earthly possessions as possible; do you perhaps hope that you will remain here for all time? Do you not see the handwriting on the wall, — how this one, or that one, is called away by death, whether he wills or not, deprived of all but a little plot of ground where his corpse is left to decay? Yes, you also are standing at the gate of eternity, every day. Suddenly this gate will open, and you will be ushered into the great Beyond, where everyone receives according to his deeds. Woe unto you, if, in caring for the temporal, you have lost sight of the eternal! What will it profit you, then, to have gained all those vain possessions and lost your immortal soul? You are among those whom the Saviour admonishes: "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal" (Matt. VI, 20), and who are exhorted by St. Paul, "to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life" (1. Tim. VI, 18, 19).

It was granted to the deceased, at whose grave we are assembled, to reconcile himself with God and to die a righteous death. Can you confidently hope for the same grace? You, who perhaps stand defiled by sin at the gate of eternity, must you not fear that suddenly it will open and you may be called to a strict reckoning, unprepared as you are? Oh, that those who pursue a sinful life carelessly and thoughtlessly, that those may realize that their years are numbered, that their judgment is nigh, that before they can make their peace with God the awful summons will come: Give an accounting! And then the dreadful irrevocable, everlasting, judgment! You may not think that this will be your fate. Many, who

did not think so, are now for ever lost. Do you wish this to be your experience? Man reaps as he sows. Your day of harvest is not far away, even now you are standing at the gate of eternity. How can you remain indifferent? Oh, that none of us, my brethren, may ever dismiss from the mind the thought: I am standing at the gate of eternity! May this thought be with all of us, not only to-day, at this grave, but every morning as we rise, every evening as we retire, every time when temptation threatens! Every time you walk through a cemetery, every time you hear that someone has died, remember that you too are standing at the gate of eternity. Now let us pray to the merciful Lord, that He may grant to the deceased His eternal rest.

IX

THE DEPARTURE FROM THIS WORLD. (Candlemas)

Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, Oh Lord (Luke II, 29).

Not all those whose last hour has come, and who must take leave from this world, are able to speak in confidence with Simeon: "Now dismiss thy servant in peace, Oh Lord!" To part with everything they possess is very hard: they must leave house and home, honours and rank, wealth and influence, their beloved wife and children, brothers, sisters, friends, and acquaintances. Gone, for ever, are the things they enjoyed, the amusements they favoured. Hard this is, particularly to those who have tied their hearts as with iron bonds to things of the world. Centuries ago the wise man said: "Oh death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!" (Eccl. XLI, 1.)

Even more oppressing than the thought of parting with everything, is man's dread of the things that are awaiting him. He thinks of the fearsome grave, with its worms and oblivion, and becomes "troubled with terrible fear" (Wisd. V, 2); he sees himself arraigned before the just Judge, "who tries the reins and the hearts" (Jer. XI, 20), and who "will give to everyone according to their works" (Apoc. II, 23). And "if the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1. Pet. IV, 18.) How will he fare before the tribunal of God? "And they, the ungodly, shall fall after this without honour, and be a reproach among the dead for ever: for he shall burst them puffed up and speechless, and shall shake them from their foundations, and

they shall be utterly laid waste: they shall be in sorrow, and their memory shall perish. They shall come with fear at the thought of their sins, and their iniquities shall stand against them to convict them" (Wisd. IV, 19, 20). "Indeed, the death of the wicked is very evil" (Ps. XXXIII, 22), and "when the wicked man is dead there shall be no hope any more" (Prov. XI, 7).

And yet, how very few give thought to all this, when in their healthy days they live a heedless life, too often a life of sin! What of them, if death were to take them by surprise, ere they could find the time and the grace for penance? Then their departure may indeed be a terrible one.

Our departed sister has found both the grace and the time for penance, and as a good Christian she availed herself of the opportunity to make peace with God; hence her departure from this world was not bitter and terrible, but consoling to her and to us. Indeed, what need is there for a good Christian to be in dread of death? By passing through the gates of death does he not leave a strange land to go to his native country? "While we are in the body we are absent from the Lord" (2. Cor. V, 6), says the Apostle, "for we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" (Heb. XIII, 14). Our home is not on earth, but in heaven, where there is happiness beyond human comprehension. As the heart of the traveller in a strange country is gladdened when he is again homeward bound, why should not the faithful Christian be of good cheer at the gate of his heavenly home? He is now removed from all dangers to his soul, from all the sufferings and troubles incidental to the pilgrimage on earth. We know those dangers to the soul, and those occasions for sin, and have experienced too often their power. Here it is a fight with the Evil One, with the world and the flesh — a fight lasting all through our life, ceasing only with our last

breath. Why should the children of God not rejoice when leaving a place replete with such dangers, when they may exclaim: "Our soul has been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are delivered" (Ps. CXXIII, 7). We all know from experience the adversities and worries of this life. They only cease when we close our eyes in death. Recalling all his sore trials, how can the good Christian help rejoicing, when the days of sorrow are over, and the day is dawning when those "will be rewarded in abundance who have waited for their bodies to be delivered" (1. Cor. XI, 32). "If we consider," says St. Gregory, "what is promised to us in heaven, surely everything we have on earth appears insignificant."

Thus, dear brethren, let us think of death quite often, and prepare ourselves for it, lest our departure from this world be sorrowful and terrible, instead of consoling. If we fall into sin, let us immediately do penance to appease the Lord, and thereafter obey His commandments, "and in doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Whether death, then, arrives sooner or later, whether suddenly or not, we shall be able to say with the devout Simeon: "Lord, dismiss thy servant in peace, according to thy word." Let us now pray for the deceased.

X

THE CANDLE AN IMAGE OF HUMAN LIFE
(CANDLEMAS)

Give ye glory to the Lord your God, before it be dark and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains (JER. XIII, 16).

WHO would have thought that the blessed candle, which our dear deceased brother took home on Candlemas Day, should so soon serve as his death candle? And yet it so happened. In the Greek Church the priests, when handing a blessed candle to the faithful, say: "My child, your life is like this candle." Our deceased brother has experienced the truth of these words, and we all shall find that our life is as rapidly spent as the candle is consumed in burning. Soon the hour will come when the blessed candle in our home will be lighted for us the last time, to give light for our entrance into eternity. The candle is an image of the human life. It will be to our benefit to give some meditation to this thought.

Man is endowed with a twofold life — the natural life of the body, and the supernatural life of the soul. This supernatural life is the light of sanctifying grace imparted by Holy Baptism, and symbolized by the burning candle which the priest holds out to the child to be christened. As long as man remains in the grace of God, the light of his soul shines brightly, but it is extinguished by grave sin, for, as St. John Chrysostom says, "an unclean life banishes grace." Even the natural life of our body is like a burning candle. A lighted candle gets shorter and shorter, and finally burns out and dies. This is the case also with the human life. At the very moment of our birth our struggle between life and death begins. It is

an erroneous belief, said the pagan philosopher Seneca, to recognize death only in its last symptoms; we are dying daily, inch by inch, as it were, and our last hour of life does not bring death, it only completes death. This truth we also see in the candle, which begins to consume itself from the moment it is lighted; it tells us: Watch, because death is coming; behold, I am alive with fire, yet I know not how long I shall burn; so it is with you, your life ebbs day by day, and you do not know when the end will be.

We may be sure there are many amongst us whose life is near its end, and yet they expect to live a long time. Some think so because they are in the prime of life; others because of their robust health. Notwithstanding all their confidence to attain a ripe old age, the light of their life is about to extinguish; they are like the foolish man in the gospel who said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest; eat, drink, and make good cheer." But God said to him: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke XII, 19, 20.) What a warning to be ever mindful of the shortness and uncertainty of life! Every time you see a burning candle, remember that your life is wasting like this candle, and you do not know how quickly it may be extinguished.

Remember, furthermore, that the burning candle is subject to accidents which accelerate its extinction. Human life is also subject to accidents and other causes that tend to shorten it, to hasten its end. We have this fact often demonstrated to us.

Hence, once more, remember that your life melts away like the burning candle, that you are ignorant of the day and of the hour when your end will come. Beware of shortening your life by your own fault. Remember that the salvation

of your soul is your most important duty: "Give glory to the Lord your God, before it is dark, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." "Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not. Whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light" (John XII, 35, 36). If, enlightened by the teachings of Jesus, strengthened by His grace, cleansed and purified by penance and virtue, you have devoted your life to the service of God, then, no matter when your last hour arrives, you may confidently say with Simeon: "Lord, now dismiss thy servant, for my eyes have seen thy salvation." Let us pray.

XI

IN LENT

Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return (1. Gen. III, 19).

Dear brethren, after the fall the Lord said to Adam: "Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." These same words are spoken by the priest at burials, when thrice he throws a shovelful of earth upon the coffin. "Into dust thou shalt return" — this was the chief penalty that the Lord pronounced upon Adam, and this truth the Church recalls to the faithful especially on Ash Wednesday. Being descendants of Adam, we are all doomed to his fate, and the coffin of our departed brother, just lowered into the ground, again recalls forcibly to our mind: "Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." Let us firmly impress these words upon our minds, and devote our endeavours more diligently to our single urgent business, our salvation.

1. "It is appointed unto men, once to die," so says the Apostle (Heb. IX, 27). Not only can we not escape death, but it mostly comes unexpected, even sudden. "Death," we are told by St. Ephraim, "is a great prince, ruling all men. Hence he demands to be awaited; he, however, does not wait for anyone." Nor does he announce his coming. We do not know when we shall die, whether in youth or old age, whether at noon or at midnight, whether this year or next. "Man knoweth not his own end" (Eccles. IX, 12). Nor do we know where we are to die — at home or abroad, in our room or in the street, on the sick-bed or in an accident. "Man knoweth not his own end." Nor does death announce how

it will come. We do not know the kind of death we shall meet — whether sudden or after a lingering illness, whether easy or in great agony, whether in consciousness or unconscious. "Man knoweth not his own end."

2. But when it does come, death parts us from everything. It takes us from house and home, from money and possessions, honours and rank, pleasures and enjoyments; it separates wife and husband, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and foes.

3. When the eyes have closed in death, the corpse is buried, it decomposes: dust returns to dust. "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering" (Isa. XIV, 11). Such is the fate of us all; the body is subject to death and destruction. What, however, happens to our immortal soul? At the death of the body the soul is arraigned before the tribunal of the all-wise and just Judge. Scarcely has the last breath been breathed, and while those that witnessed the death are still kneeling at the death-bed, the soul appears before the throne of God. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment," so says the Apostle (Heb. IX, 27); "for we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Jesus" (2. Cor. V, 10) to give an accounting of our thoughts, desires, words and deeds, as also for the omission of the good that we should have done.

All this, dear brethren, is in store for us, perhaps sooner than we expect. Indeed, why say *perhaps* sooner? It *will* be sooner, in every case, than we expect. Death will come, to part us from everything we have and enjoy, from all that is dear and beloved to us on earth. Then the dead body will be carried to the burying-ground, and lowered into the depth of the grave, the same as the one before us, and our soul will be arraigned before the judgment-seat of God, to receive eternal reward or eternal punishment, according to our deserts,

according to the manner of our life in the body. "Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." It is related of one of the early German Emperors, that he had his coffin made while yet in full health, and he kept it in his bedchamber. It proved an excellent adviser, and when death came, this man could die without fear or regret. It would be well for us all, to at least think of the coffin that once will hold our body, maybe soon. Think of it when you pass the cemetery, when you see a funeral, when you retire at night, when aroused from sleep, but especially when tempted to sin. This thought will keep you from sin and spur you on to virtue. Listen to the advice of St. Ambrose, who says: "Picture yourself frequently as descending into the grave; it will turn your eyes away from vanity, and you will take good care not to offend God." This simple means will enable us, aided by the grace of God, to preserve a clear conscience and to make progress in virtue. Then we can meet death unflinchingly, when the allotted time is expiring; then we may confidently hope to die in the grace of God, and to be received into the dwellings of everlasting peace. We hope and pray that our deceased brother will also be admitted there, for he has led a Christian life and has partaken recently of the last rites and Sacraments. That our hope be fulfilled, let us pray.

XII

BLESSED COMFORT AT THE GRAVE

And he was transfigured before them (Matt. XVII, 2).

Whenever we stand at a grave, we sincerely hope that the person there buried is now taking part in the glory of God, and in this hope there is the greatest consolation and balm for our sorrow. That we may hope for a transfiguration in the hereafter, is vouched for by the transfiguration of our Lord upon Mount Tabor, which was related in the gospel of last Sunday.

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father, assumed, according to the teachings of our faith, in the fulness of time, human nature, "that he might redeem them who were under the law" (Gal. IV, 5). His human nature became transfigured on Mount Tabor, for the gospel says: "His face did shine as the sun" (Matt. XVII, 2). While this of itself proves that our human body can be transfigured, we get additional assurance of this fact from our faith: because through the Redemption Christ has become our Head and we have become His members. If the Head has been transfigured, the members must necessarily become transfigured too, because they must have closest connection with the Head. Furthermore, Christ, as our Redeemer, has gained for us the right for a future transfiguration. "For by him we have access to the Father," says the Apostle (Eph. II, 18), and "glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. V, 2). To dispel all doubts of our transfiguration He entered, at His ascension, into the glory of heaven before

the eyes of His disciples. Hence, we have in Christ's transfiguration a pledge for our own future transfiguration. Yes, we all shall be transfigured, provided we believe all that God has revealed, and all that He commands us to believe through His holy Church, and walk the path prescribed by His commands. "But without faith," says St. Paul, "it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him" (Heb. XI, 6), and the Saviour Himself bids us: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. XIX, 17). To become transfigured with Christ we must walk the path that He has walked, we must endeavour to be like Him in His love for God and man, in His humility, His purity of heart, His self-denial, His patience, and His resignation to the will of God. "He that followeth me," says the Saviour, "walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John VIII, 12); he will be transfigured as Jesus was transfigured.

In Christ's transfiguration we have an image of our coming transfiguration. St. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ "will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory" (Phil. III, 21). On Mount Tabor "His face did shine as the sun and his garments became white as snow" (Matt. XVII, 2). "Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father" (Matt. XIII, 43), says Holy Writ, and again: "He that shall overcome, shall thus be clothed in white garments" (Apoc. III, 5).

And what human being can describe the bliss that is in store for the transfigured? "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house: and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure," exclaims the Psalmist (Ps. XXXV, 9). And St. Paul assures us: "That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor.

II, 9). Commenting on these words, St. Augustine says: "The glory, beauty, and majesty composing our beatitude are beyond all conception and words. What God has prepared for his friends surpasses belief, and exceeds all our hope, wishes, and desires."

We have reason to hope, my dear brethren, that our departed friend has entered eternity as a friend of God; he has led a Christian life, he has borne his sickness with patience, and has reconciled himself to God by receiving the Holy Sacraments. Hence, we may take comfort, and may rejoice because of the bliss which we hope he has fallen heir to. But let us also often think of the transfiguration that awaits us. Let us do so especially when tempted to sin, when disheartened by unsuccessful work and by hardship, when struck by affliction and adversity. We may derive comfort from the words of the Apostle: "Yet so, if we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. VIII, 17); and we shall be encouraged and strengthened, to keep our body pure and undefiled by sin, to observe the commandments of the Lord, and to zealously take advantage of our daily opportunities to do good. Now let us pray for the deceased.

XIII

IN HOLY WEEK

For God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but unto purchasing of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us; that we may live together with him (1. Thess. V, 9, 10).

Dear brethren, the Cross of Jesus, to which we are led by holy Mother Church in Holy Week, is the best consolation for all who are sorrowful and burdened, and the way of the Cross, as trodden by our Lord Himself, is the royal road leading to eternal life. Through ignominy to honour, through struggle to victory, through the agony of death to the throne of God, through the dark grave to the heavenly light — this is the road to be followed by the faithful. Therefore you who are mourning and weeping, step beneath His Cross and learn from Him to bear suffering and affliction, to be patient in adversity, learn to overcome even death and the grave. The Apostle tells us: "God hath not appointed us unto wrath (not to damnation), but unto the purchasing of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that we may live together with him." The death of the Lord reveals its most magnificent power in the hour of our death.

1. It reveals its power to *strengthen* and to make us bear patiently the physical agony of death. The hour of death is a hard hour: the breaking up of the human frame is often accompanied by great suffering. If we then remember how the Lord died on Golgotha, how dare we complain? St. Peter says: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps" (1. Pet. I, 2, 4). We are lying on a bed made by loving hands — His bed

was the hard wood of the Cross; we are refreshed by love and sympathy — He was given vinegar mingled with gall by unfeeling soldiers; we are comforted and encouraged by the kind words of priest and friends — He had to listen to mockery and jeering. Therefore be patient and courageous in bearing the last, short pain.

2. Christ's death reveals also its *redeeming* power, enabling us to bear with confidence the sorrow of parting from our beloved ones. Hard indeed is the hour of death, separating us from those we love, from those who may be in further need of our care and support. If we turn our eyes to the Cross, we see His Mother standing there and the disciple He loved best. Jesus was mindful of His Mother's welfare on earth and entrusted her to the care of St. John. He gave to Mary a son, and to him a mother. Let us, too, confide our dear and beloved ones to Christ's hand and protection. God is the Father of the orphaned, Jesus their help and guide, the Holy Ghost their Comforter.

3. The death of Jesus, finally, reveals its redeeming power in obtaining for us, by virtue of its merits, the remission of our sins, and everlasting life. The hour of death is hard, it contains a foreboding of the judgment: we see clearly our entire life with its sins, our heart with its frailties, our conscience with its accusations. It is then that the power of the Redeemer's death especially manifests itself. The anxious heart looks up to His Cross, in the faithful belief of His atoning death, putting all its confidence and hope in Him, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. VIII, 7), and it prays to share in the merit of His redeeming death through the receipt of the holy Sacraments. Cleansed from sin by virtue of the Sacrament of Penance, united with the Redeemer in the Most Holy Eucharist, fortified by the graces

of the last holy rites, the good Christian faces death with calmness, and confidently says in his dying whispers: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Our departed sister was entitled to say this; hence, we may hope that she has heard the words which our Saviour spoke to the penitent sinner: "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." But, my dear brethren, is it so sure that we also shall have ample time and the grace to prepare for death by receiving the holy Sacraments? This we cannot know, for death comes often suddenly and unexpected, like a thief in the night. We do know "that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God" (1. Cor. VIII, 9). Hence St. Paul admonishes us "to lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on the true life" (1. Tim. VI, 19), and "to be careful to excel in good works. These things are good and profitable unto men" (Titus III, 8) and are rewarded with everlasting life. "And in doing good, let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). For the deceased, however, let us pray.

XIV

CHRIST TEACHES US HOW TO DIE
(The Seven Last Words)

Looking on Jesus the author and finisher of faith, who having joy set before him, endured the cross (Heb. XII, 2).

Dear brethren, in human life there is many an anxious and solemn hour of utmost importance, but none more so than the last hour, the hour of death, from which no one can escape. It is the most important hour, for it is the hour when we must part from the life on earth, so dear to us notwithstanding its many sufferings: from our beloved, who often are still very much in need of us; from our earthly possessions, acquired by strenuous work and by the effort of long years. It is an important hour, because it is the hour of our departure for a land which no mortal eyes have ever seen, which we know, however, by our faith. An anxious hour it is, for it is an hour of struggle, often of intense pain, when the soul frees itself from the ties of the body, and the breaking heart is worried by the memory of past sins. A solemn hour, for it is the hour which takes us before the judgment-seat of Him, to whom everything is known, who will judge us all the more severe, the more graces He has bestowed. These are the reasons why many men avoid thinking of this hour, though no man can escape from it. And since we cannot escape from it, it will be good for us to learn how to die, while still in the fulness of life. And where can we learn how to die, and from whom? From no one better than from Him, who has been our model even in death, who,

indeed, has for our benefit, overcome the power of death, nay more, who has died for us, that we may die in comfort of soul and confidence. Hence, let us look up to Jesus, the "Author and Finisher of faith, who, having joy set before him, endured the Cross." Let us step beneath the Cross of the Redeemer, contemplate His death, and learn from Him how to die.

1. When Jesus was dying on the Cross, His first word was a prayer for His enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke XXIII, 24). If this was the prayer of Him who was free from sin how much more urgent to pray thus it is for us who have sinned and need forgiveness, and who must pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Therefore on our death-bed we should follow the example of the Saviour, forgive all those who have done us injury, who have caused us grief, who have slighted us, embittered our life, or shortened it. For death is followed by the judgment, and with what measure we mete out it shall be measured to us. If we expect grace and mercy, we must be merciful to others. "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven," commands the Lord (Luke VI, 37); "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy" (James II, 13).

2. Then the Saviour turned His eyes to His Mother, weeping under the Cross, and He charged His beloved disciple to care for her with the loyalty of a son. To arrange our important temporal affairs before our death is a sacred duty. It should not be left to strangers to do what you have neglected to do, to those who do it, perhaps, to the disadvantage of those you have left behind. To prevent possible disaster and disagreement, see to it that the tears of sorrow shed for you are free from just reproach on that account.

3. The Saviour turning to the penitent thief, kindly

assured him: "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." We are thus admonished to remember on our death-bed the salvation of those around us. "Behold, I die and God will be with you," thus spoke Jacob. The blessing of the dying just is of great and wonderful power; it builds houses for the children, and will deeply permeate the hearts of the survivors to their edification and benefit.

4. Finally, we should imitate the Saviour in enduring our suffering with patience. The agony He suffered on the Cross is manifested by His cry: "I thirst," and by His anxious sigh: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And yet He overcame with patience all these terrors of death, and He drained the chalice of suffering to the dregs. We, too, may have to struggle with death in great agony, but it is the last struggle, and as God has given us the strength to bear in patience the afflictions of this earthly life, we shall with His aid also vanquish the agony of death. The Saints and Angels will hasten to our assistance, the hope for heaven and for eternal beatitude will aid us in proving our devotion and faith even unto death.

5. "It is consummated!" This was the crucified Saviour's cry of triumph. His task was finished, and so was His life, His humiliation, His suffering. When on our death-bed our soul, looking backward, reviews our entire life, happy is he who can then truthfully say that he has not lived in vain; who can depart conscious of having faithfully finished his task, who can say with the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: as to the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render me in that day" (2. Tim. IV, 7, 8). But if we cannot say this, if the heart is anxious and oppressed by the thought of past sins, what are we to do? What else and what better can we do than to repent of our sins

from the bottom of our heart, to pray that the Lord may have mercy on us, for the sake of the merits of Christ, to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance, to enter the union with Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, to obtain the graces bestowed by the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, to atone for our misdeeds by patiently enduring our sickness as a temporal penalty, and by other good deeds?

6. Only then may we say with the Saviour: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke XXIII, 46). This, the last prayer of the Lord, should be also our last words. Though the body is buried, and turns into dust, the spirit, the soul, is immortal; this we know by the faith. We are redeemed, redeemed by the death of Jesus; therefore we may, reconciled with God, depart in good cheer, with confidence in the glorious promises of our Lord. Death has no terror for us, it will lead us into the land of everlasting glory. We may hope that our departed brother, having led a good, Christian life, and having duly prepared himself for death, has also been received into the promised land. Let us offer our prayers for him, so that if, on account of minor blemishes, he must go through the cleansing fire of purgatory, the Lord may graciously hasten the time of his delivery. Let us pray.

XV

OUR SAVIOUR IN THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH

For I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2. Tim. I, 12).

The darkest hour of life, the most terrible, the most cheerless, is to many men their last hour. "Oh, death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that has peace in his possessions" (Ecclus. XLI, 1). Many of you, dear brethren, may have been witnesses to the fact that the hour of death is a most solemn one, and often full of anguish.

Where shall we look for aid and comfort in this last, hard hour, that is in store for every one of us sooner or later? I say: we must look there, where all through life we have found our best cheer, the greatest comfort, the firmest support, and that is the faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore St. Paul said: "I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." The Apostle is never in doubt as to whom to turn, in whom to trust, when that solemn hour arrives, the hour of death, the hour of accounting. And the Apostle is confident that his deposits, namely, his good works and merits, will bring him aid and comfort in that dread hour of agony. His belief in Christ was St. Paul's comfort in all his sufferings and adversities, and also his comfort and support in the hour of death. Happy is he who preserves the faith in the Lord during his life, and who can testify that his Redeemer is also to him the sweetest comfort in the hour of death!

1. In Christ we see in our last hour the true friend of those we leave behind. It is natural that the dying father or mother, husband or wife, be troubled about the fate of the beloved ones. Even our Lord dying on the Cross was thoughtful of the welfare of the one nearest to Him in His life, and He gave His Blessed Mother into the care of John. To whom may we entrust those we are leaving behind, and who perhaps are much in need of care? Fortunate is the man who can charge loyal friends with that care: but even the most loyal friends are but human, often even they can do nothing to help, nor can they protect their wards from all dangers to soul and body, nor ensure their salvation. But Christ *can* do all this, and He *will* do it for the widowed and orphaned. He will be their aid and protection, their Comfort and Guide, their Redeemer, who will give them life everlasting. "No man shall pluck them out of my hand" (John X, 28), and "I will not leave you orphans" (John XIV, 18), says the Lord. Truly a great comfort to know that our beloved ones have in Christ the truest of friends.

2. In our last hour on earth we have in Christ the pledge of our future life. The longing for life after death is rooted deep in the hearts of men. This is recognized even among the pagans. Positive assurance of it we have only through Christ, and He became our pledge for it, because through suffering death Himself He also vanquished death, for, true to His word, He rose from death and thus proclaimed Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life. "He, that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, shall quicken also your mortal bodies because of the spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. VIII, 11), says the Apostle, and "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again: even so them who have slept through Jesus, will God bring with him" (1. Thess. IV, 13). His resurrection is the image of our own future resurrection,

and of our everlasting life. What comfort in the parting hour, what great relief it is to the dying heart to cling in faith to the Saviour's word: "He, that believeth in me, although he be dead shall live: and every one that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die for ever" (John XI, 25, 26).

3. In Christ we have, moreover, in the hour of death a merciful Deliverer from our sins. The knowledge of having sinned causes at no time more anxiety than at the hour of death; then we see our life before us like an open book, with many, alas, boundless sins recorded therein, and pointing an accusing finger at us. Where can we find comfort in this plight? Perhaps in the good deeds we have done in our lifetime?

Even if we have done thousands of good deeds they will of themselves not atone before the judgment-seat of God for a single mortal sin. There is comfort and aid only in Christ, who suffered death for our sins, and blotted them out with His Blood, who atoned to divine justice for our iniquities, and purchased with His Blood the everlasting life for us. "If any man sin," says St. John, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1. John II, 12). Hence, if in sorrow and penitence we take refuge in the mercy of God, seeking pardon, grace, consolation, and salvation through the Sacraments instituted by Christ, then He will say to us the words He said to the man sick with the palsy: "Be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee" (Matt. IX, 2). Happy he who dies in the faith, for he passes from eternal death to eternal life, and dies in hope and good cheer.

4. In Christ we have, finally, in our last hour the kindly Giver of eternal life. The mere knowledge that we are immortal is not sufficient to give us comfort, neither in life

nor in death: on the contrary, the uncertainty whether this eternal life will be for us also a blessed one will cast us down. We wish to know not only that our life continues, but how it will continue. Since God is just, and since we are sinners, our eternal life could not be a happy one without Jesus Christ our Lord. Being the Redeemer from sin, He is also the kindly Giver of the eternal, blessed life. He redeemed us from sin on the Cross, He gives us life eternal since He ascended to heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. Those he desires to have with Him are blessed by this very desire of the Lord, for our blessedness is in the union with Him.

Oh, happy belief, oh, blissful hope, founded upon the Lord! And he who says with St. Paul, to his last breath: "I know whom I believe in," meaning his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, has the best comfort in his hour of death, and he will depart in peace and confidence. May such a happy death be the lot of every one of us!

We have reason to believe that our departed brother has died such a death, on account of the Christian life he led, of the patience he showed in his sickness, and of the fact that he received the holy Sacraments in the last days of his sickness. Yet, in the spirit of Christian charity, let us pray for him, that the Lord may rest his soul in peace.

XVI

MARY MAGDALEN AT THE GRAVE OF THE LORD
(Easter Time)

Mary at the sepulchre weeping (John XX, 11).

1. Like us at this hour, my dear brethren, so Mary Magdalen once stood mourning and weeping at a grave. On Easter morn, when it was yet dark, she went to the sepulchre, and let her tears flow unchecked. She thought the disciples had carried the Lord away, and desired to know where they had laid Him. He, however, whom she believed among the dead, had risen from death.

We have carried to the cemetery a brother, dear to our hearts, and the house wherein he lived has become desolate. But he whom we mourn lives, as the Lord liveth in whom he so steadfastly believed, and who said: "He that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live" (John XI, 25). Our dear, departed brother did believe in the Lord, and we hope that a glorious blessed life is now his reward. Must we not in our grief be comforted by this thought?

2. Mary Magdalen is disconsolate, yet consolation is nigh. Her tears fail to relieve her sorrow, the longing for the beloved Lord overcame her dread and fear; she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and behold, where the body of the Lord had lain, she saw two angels in white. They ask her kindly: "Why weepest thou?" and Mary, in her grief, bursts forth with the plaint: "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him."

We also are standing at an open grave of a beloved one, the coffin is lowered, and we take up a last handful of earth that

its first covering may bear our last prayer and blessing. At your side, too, are standing angels, though invisible, and their question is also: "Why weepest thou? Knowest thou not that thy Redeemer liveth, that he for whom thou weepest, is with his Lord in the kingdom of glory? Why weepest thou? Behold, there above is thy native land, there thou shalt again meet thy beloved one after a short while."

3. Mary seeks the Lord, and, behold, He whom she is seeking appears before her. Not finding the body of our Lord, she leaves the sepulchre, and as she retraces her steps, He whom she is seeking, stands before her, but she fails to recognize Him, mistaking Him for the gardener. He asks her the same question that the angels had asked, yet she still does not know Him, and she asks where the body of the Lord is.

A mound will rise on the grave before us, and we shall plant on it a cross, as a sign that during his life the departed believed in the Saviour. We plant flowers there, too, as tokens of our affection and love. Yet while our thoughts are thus concerned with the dead body, the dear departed is living in the life beyond.

4. Mary at last realizes the Lord's resurrection. He says: "Mary!" and then she recognizes the Lord. And now that she recognizes Him, she falls at His feet; the tears flow again, but they are tears of joy.

Although we view with sadness the place where our beloved one lies sleeping, the word of the Lord assures us that down in the grave there lies only his body, and that his spirit is dwelling blissfully in a better world. It assures us, also, that on the day of the resurrection God will provide for him a new, a gloriously transfigured body, and that we all shall meet again and recognize one another, as Mary recognized the Lord.

Thus we find consolation in the truths that are recalled to our mind by the event of Easter morn. Our deceased brother has led a Christian life, and he prepared himself for death through the last holy rites, devoutly received, and by his resignation to the holy Will of the Lord. Hence, we may hope that he is with the Lord, whom in his life he has sought and loved. If we desire that we, too, may after death be allowed to seek Jesus in the kingdom of His Father, to meet again and be united for ever with all those we have loved and treasured on earth, then we must be penitent, as Mary Magdalen was, and love Christ as Mary Magdalen did. Then we may hope to live for evermore, and to "receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wis. V, 17). Let us pray that these be granted to our departed brother.

XVII

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive (1. Cor. XV, 22).

We poor humans feel our limitations and need sympathy and comfort especially when committing to the grave the earthly remains of one dearly beloved. Yet how little sympathy we can find in the world, how inefficient it is to console us! Where then, dear brethren, are we to find comfort in our sorrow? Where are we to look for consolation when hardship falls to our lot, or when finally death comes to summon us?

That this will happen one day is beyond doubt: "My spirit shall be wasted, my days shall be shortened, and only the grave remaineth for me," said patient Job (XVII, 1), and so say most men who have arrived at the end of their earthly career. Indeed, nothing but the grave remaineth for all of us, whether rich or poor, old or young. All must go back to the earth, to the clay they were formed of, and of every child of man it shall be fulfilled what the Lord God said to Adam after the fall: "Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return."

But shall the body remain for ever in the grave? Will it be for ever under the power of death? It will not. The human body originally was not mortal, it became so as punishment of sin: "God has not made death," says Holy Writ, "death is the wages of sin." The Son of God, in delivering us by His death from sin and perdition, has conquered death, and on the day of the general resurrection the grave will give up its dead. Hence the Apostle rejoices: "Death is swallowed up in vic-

tory. Oh, death, where is thy victory? Oh, death, where is thy sting? Now the sting of death is sin: but thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1. Cor. XV, 54, 57). What does the Apostle's question mean? "Death, where is thy victory, where is thy sting?" He means that the victory of death is in its sting, and there is no more victory for death, because its sting is taken away, because Christ has atoned for sin.

This, my friends, is the great truth of faith about the resurrection from death. It alone dispels all doubt, and answers all questions as to man's nature and destination. It is the hope of the Christian, which alone has the power to reassure him when standing at the grave of a dearly beloved, or at the threshold of his own death. This was the consolation of patient Job: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin and in my flesh. I shall see my God, whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold and not another: this my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job VIII, 25–28). The divine Saviour Himself vouches for this hope, saying: "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son also to have life in him, and he hath given him power to do judgment because he is the Son of Man. And the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John V, 25, 28).

To dispel even the least doubt of this truth, Christ rose from the dead, the first-fruit of them that sleep. His resurrection is therefore the surest bond for our own future resurrection. As sure as the Lord on Easter day emerged from

the grave, and entered the new life of Transfiguration, so surely shall all men rise from their graves and return into life. Through the sin of Adam death came into the world, but death will again be abolished by Christ after the history of mankind has run its course. "For by a man came death," says the Apostle, "and by a man the resurrection of the dead: and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1. Cor. XV, 21, 22). Then this earthly frame of our body, dissolved by death, will be rebuilt as new, a house not made with hands, but for the eternal glory in heaven. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first. It is sown in corruption (meaning the interment of the body), it shall rise in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory: it is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power, it is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality, and then the just shall shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their father" (1. Cor. XV). What an abundant source of comfort is offered by this divine truth! How consoling is the Christian's hope! But also what an urgent admonition to be patient, to be just, and persevering in virtue!

And when we rise shall all of us be equally beautified and transfigured? "We shall all indeed rise again," says the Apostle, "but we shall not all be changed," meaning, not all will be transfigured. Only the just, those that die in Christ, shall rise in the glory of transfiguration to life everlasting: but the unrighteous shall rise in dishonour and clothed in damnation. What, then, must we do, that we may hope for salvation? The Apostle answers: "Christ died for all: that they also who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again" (2. Cor. V, 15). This means that Christ has died for us that we may rise to the works

of justice, but we must live in the flesh no longer, nor in the bondage of sin, but in the spirit of the Lord's teaching and example. "Therefore we cease not to pray for you," writes St. Paul to the Colossians (I, 9, 10), "and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of Christ's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing, being fruitful in every good work . . . strengthened with all might . . . to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light." Shall I tell you of an excellent means to be strengthened with all might for a walk worthy of God, to be endowed with the hope for a blessed resurrection? It is the Holy Eucharist, which gives to the Christian strength in the struggle with sin, perseverance in that which is good, and preserves the seed of immortality even in his body. Of this we are assured by the Saviour, who said: "He that eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever."

I exhort you, therefore, to receive often in your life this divine Bread, and partake of it especially and repeatedly in sickness, as did the departed whom we mourn. Then, if your sickness should turn out to be fatal, you may hope to die the death of the just, and to be resurrected to glory. Those whom this departed has left behind are comforted by the hope that he whose loss they are mourning has gone through death to a new and glorious life, to everlasting blessedness. This hope we may well entertain for our departed brother. Let us now pray for him in the spirit of love.

XVIII

WARNINGS OF DEATH

And now I go to Him that sent me (John XVI, 5).

This word in the gospel of last Sunday was addressed by the Saviour to His disciples when He was about to leave this world, to return to His heavenly Father. His ascension followed soon after this. "While they beheld he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight." The Saviour of course knew the exact time when He would leave this world; but to us it is not given to know when we shall be called away. "Man knoweth not his own end," says Holy Writ (Eccl. IX, 12). Our departed sister surely did not think at the beginning of this month that she was not to see its end, yet it thus came to pass. She could not find words enough of gratitude and praise for God, for having given her the time and the grace to prepare for a good death. While we do not know when our end shall come, we are given many warnings of death. God in His wisdom and mercy sends them, so we may be ready for our departure when the hour draws nigh!

1. Many there are of such warnings, if we will only heed them. Nature reminds us of death. The setting sun, marking the end of the day, warns us that the day of our life will end sometime. The flowers withering and fading, the trees and shrubs losing their leaves in autumn and bare of life in winter, are images of our own death, and recall to mind the passage from Holy Writ: "All flesh shall fade as grass, and as the leaf that springeth out of a green tree" (Ecclus. XIV,18). We are reminded of death when we hear of the death of others, when we pay the last tribute to a deceased, as

we are doing to-day, whenever we pass a cemetery, whenever prayers for the dead are offered in church. The death of a neighbour, of a member of your family — is it not a warning that you, too, will soon go the way of all flesh? Such warning, is, moreover, given you every night when you retire, for sleep resembles death so much that it has been called the brother of death. "As you lie in bed, thus will you lie in the grave," warned us a great Saint. And as you get along in years, is not this fact itself a warning that your pilgrimage to the grave will soon reach its goal? When laid up with sickness, must it not occur to you that this sickness may lead to death? Indeed, everything around us warns us: "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. IX, 27), and exhorts us: "Boast not for to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day to come shall bring forth" (Prov. XXVII, 1).

2. Alas, these warnings are seldom heeded by youth and old age alike. Of course, old people are, according to human reckoning, nearer to the gate of death than young people, but youth also is subject to the words of Holy Writ: "There is but one sleep between me and death" (1. Kings, XX, 3). Frequently we hear that a robust youth, a strong young girl, was taken sick and died. Nevertheless young people go on so thoughtlessly, so confidently, as if there were no such thing as death. "Let us crown ourselves with roses, let us everywhere leave tokens of joy" (Wis. II, 8, 9). This is their watchword, day by day; they think of nothing but of fine clothes, of joys and pleasures. If they receive an earnest warning of death, they heed it not. But even persons along in years are blind to such warnings. Many of these people have thought all through their lives little of God, they are with the fetters of habit attached to luxury, to covetousness, to world, and to sin; they cannot bear to think of death. Many an old person never gives a thought to death, yet his

daily increasing infirmity should warn him of death and the grave, and that for him, in the words of St. Peter (I, 4, 7), "the end of the world is at hand." Many of those stricken with severe sickness do not care to be reminded of death, and of the necessity to prepare for the end.

Dear brethren, let us not be heedless of these warnings of death, for it would be dangerous, and might cause our eternal perdition. Since we do not know *when* we are to die, we must at all times be prepared to die a good death. "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin" Ecclus. VII, 40). Keeping our mind on death will cause us to be cautious and careful in our actions, and will turn us to God if we have sinned; it will encourage us to carry our cross with patience, to do good, and to lay up a store of good works against the autumn of our life. Let us now offer a prayer for the departed.

XIX

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

Dear brethren, standing here at the grave of a deceased sister, looking at the place where her corpse will go through decomposition, and looking at the graves of our deceased relatives, friends, and neighbours, all around us, we cannot resist the thought that our soul, too, will some day depart for eternity, then it will be *our* body that they will carry to the graveyard to be buried. It is proper, therefore, to pause in our journey through life, to ask ourselves: Whither goest thou? to reward or to perdition? When undertaking a long journey, we first of all make sure of the way, we equip ourselves with all the necessaries for travelling; — but of our great journey into eternity we think, I am afraid, but rarely, nor do we prepare properly for it. After we in this world have started on a trip, and it occurs to us that we have left something important undone, we can mend matters, we can go back to do it; but once death has started us onto eternity, there is no going back to do what we have neglected to do. Hence, what can be more advisable than to ask ourselves in time: Whither goest thou? and to prepare for the great journey.

To the question: Whither goest thou? the wise Solomon replies: "Man shall go into the house of his eternity" (Ecclus. XII, 5).

The souls of the just go into a blessed eternity, the souls of the evil into a wretched eternity. Hence, our most important task in life will be to provide for the future life, that we may enter the house of blessedness. If we attempted to cross

the frozen surface of a river, we would not at once jump upon the ice with both feet, but, keeping one foot on firm ground, we would cautiously test with the other foot the strength of the ice, and if we found it thin and breaking, we would quickly withdraw our foot and not take the risk to break through the ice and drown. We are very careful that no harm befall our body, but are we just as careful regarding our soul? We make very sure of our steps here; what about the step betwixt time and eternity, the one step that can never be retraced even if we should find that we are going the wrong way? He who upon his death has entered the house of a wretched eternity has no hope of escape, he is past redemption.

This we know, dear brethren, and yet there are many of us who think of everything else except the journey into eternity, who think of the things we cannot take along on this journey rather than of those upon which the salvation of our immortal souls depend. The hearts of many of us cling to the idle and perishable goods of this world, to its empty honours and joys, and pursue them strenuously day and night. Yet those things do not make their souls happy even in this life, much less can they secure eternal blessedness; on the contrary, they often bring about the eternal death of the soul. Therefore let us often ask ourselves: Whither goest thou — to perdition or to reward? and if the answer shows that we are on the broad road to perdition, let us make haste to return to the path of virtue that leads to everlasting life. If we desire to arrive at our proper destination on the journey to eternity, the journey we began on the very day of our birth, we must seek to acquire the things that we can take along into the hereafter, the things that have value there, namely, virtues and merits. Things like real estate and personal estate, gold and jewels, diamonds and fine clothes, titles and honours — all these must be left behind. What follows us into eternity

are our deeds only — good deeds that earn for us heavenly reward, or else, evil deeds for which we must pay the penalty.

We have reason to hope that our departed sister has arrived at her destination and entered blessed eternity: for she has led a Christian life, she exercised the virtue of charity as best she could, and died fortified by the holy rites, and resigned to the holy will of God. Now let us ask ourselves: If I had been in her place, if I should die right now and here, whither should I go — to reward or to punishment? This solemn thought should induce in us the firm resolution to lead henceforth the life that we shall wish to have led when the hour of death comes. Let us now pray.

XX

THE DAY OF ACCOUNTING

Give an account of thy stewardship: for now thou canst be steward no longer (Luke XVI, 2).

Dear brethren, in last Sunday's gospel we heard the summons to the steward: "Give an account of thy stewardship: for thou canst be steward no longer." This call for an accounting has also come to our departed brother: he has given his account to the eternal Judge and has received the sentence. A similar call will come for everyone of us, at the end of our life, when there is at hand the hour of account.

1. This hour of accounting will come without fail and St. Paul declares: "It is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment" (Heb. IX, 27). No man is exempt from this universal law of death. Death accepts no ransom; it is as insensible to the money of the rich as to the tears of the poor: nor can the most skilful of physicians finally avert death. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," says the Apostle (2. Cor. V, 10). We do not know when this day of accounting will come. "But of that day and hour no one knoweth," says the Saviour (Matt. XXIV, 36).

2. This hour of accounting will be extremely trying. We shall have to account for the fulfilment of duties imposed upon us by our position and vocation: for the use we have made of the time allotted to us: for the use we have made of our possessions; for all our thoughts, desires, words, and acts, as well as for omissions of prescribed works, yes, for our entire life. The Judge will ask of you, Christian par-

ents, whether you have raised your children in the teaching and law of the Lord, or whether you have neglected their education and given scandal to them. He will ask, of you all, whether you have made good use of your time for your own salvation and for that of your neighbours. He will ask of you whether you have given of your abundance to works of charity, or whether you have been uncharitable; He will ask whether God has been in your thoughts and aims, or whether you have given your heart to sordid, proud, covetous, and revengeful thoughts. He will ask of you, whether your speech was good and edifying, or unkind and frivolous: He will ask whether you have led a Christian life, or whether you have walked "as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. III, 18), in lewdness, drunkenness, uncharitableness, and impiety. And the Judge, who will ask all these questions, is God Almighty Himself, "and the Lord is a God of all knowledge" (1. Kings II, 3), to whom nothing is hidden, before whom no excuses can avail. He is God Almighty, from whom no one can escape, whose power is irresistible. He is God the Just, who does not look at persons, but at deeds, and renders accordingly. He is, finally, God the Inexorable, who, when the time of mercy is exhausted and night has come, "when no man can work" (John IX, 4), will be unrelenting in His judgment, unmoved by pleading and tears.

3. This hour of accounting will for all eternity decide your blessedness or wretchedness. He who stands the test of this hour will hear the words of comfort: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many: enter thou into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. XXV, 21). But he whose account is found wanting will hear the terrible words: "Depart from me into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. XXV, 41).

Our departed brother has already passed through this important hour; let us hope that our Lord has mercifully accepted his penance, his patience in suffering, and his Christian preparation for death. When this important hour will come for us, we do not know; it will, however, come sooner than we expect. Hence, let us prepare for this hour. Let us be reconciled to the Lord by sincere penance. Let us employ the time still allotted to us in working out our salvation, and try to earn by meritorious deeds the reward of heaven. "And in doing good let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Let us now pray.

XXI

BEHOLD, A DEAD MAN WAS CARRIED OUT

And when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was carried out (LUKE VII, 12).

DEAR friends, that which came to pass when the Saviour arrived at the gate of Naim has come to pass at this very hour: we have carried out a dead man, to return him to the clay. What the Saviour did on that occasion for the dead man, that *we* cannot do; we cannot raise this dead body, what we *can* do is to take warning from the event and raise our own soul to a better life.

There was once a saintly man who often meditated on death, and found himself spiritually benefited by these meditations. He bade the grave-digger call on him every day, shovel in hand, to ask him: "Father, when shall I dig your grave?" There are not many people who like to think of death; most persons when reminded of it by the death of someone they know, or otherwise, cannot banish fast enough that thought from their mind, yet, notwithstanding all shirking of the thought, despite their presumption that their hour of death will not come for a long time, their hour of death is coming stealthily nearer and nearer, and is likely to surprise them when least expected. Our own experience shows how true this is. One day we see a young child die, another day a rosy-cheeked young girl, an athletic youth, there a man in the prime of life, here a mother of many children. Little, therefore, can we rely upon youth, health, or strength. We may be certain that it will not be long before death will be knocking at our own door, and let us beware lest the

death of our body be followed by the everlasting death of our soul.

What brings on the everlasting death of the soul, I need hardly tell you: it is mortal sin. The Apostle says: "For the wages of sin are death" (Rom. VI, 23), and the royal prophet David warns: "Death comes upon them [the sinners] and they go down into hell" (Ps. LIV, 16). Therefore, woe unto him who dies in sin. And all too easily may this happen, dear brethren. At no time are we safe from death: it takes us unawares, like a thief at night. Hence, what better can we do than to think often of death, and to prepare for it by a penitent life? An old legend tells us that Mary Magdalen was moved to the abhorrence of her sinful life by the death of a young friend. It made her think of her own death when she saw this youth carried to the burial ground to become the food of worms. She was overcome with terror, she thought of the awful fate in store for her if she should die in her sins, and she hastened to prostrate herself before Jesus, full of penance and contrition, and, having found mercy and forgiveness, she led a penitent life from that time on.

Would to God we would all be affected in the same way by the thought of death! We all have sinned, and we all have to fear the judgment of God if death were to overtake us suddenly. Hence, let us make haste to turn back to the Lord and to make ready for death. "If the householder did know what hour the thief would come, he would surely watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open," says the Saviour. "Be you then also ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come" (Luke XII, 39). Hence, do not postpone your penance. You do not know if, ere death comes, you will be granted, as was our departed sister, the time and grace for penance and for an earnest preparation for the judgment. "A delayed penance is seldom

a good penance," warns St. Augustine. Always endeavour to live so as, in the hour of death, you will wish you had lived. Then, even though death may surprise you, you will be prepared for it; you will die the death of the righteous to be received into the Kingdom of God. Now let us pray.

XXII

CONDUCT TOWARDS THE SICK

They brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in bed (Matt. IX, 3).

Dear brethren, our dear sister has been delivered from her sufferings. As you may know, she was sick in bed for many months, and suffering great pain. She found comfort in the loving care and comfort shown her by her relations, and especially in the frequent reception of the holy Sacraments and in her prayers to the crucified Saviour, whom she tried to imitate by bearing her sufferings in resignation to God's holy will. Thus she prepared for a good death and laid in store many merits for heaven. Not in all cases are sick persons treated with such love and care as our suffering sister was. This prompts me, my dear friends, to say a few words about the proper conduct and demeanour towards sick persons, and I take my text from the gospel of last Sunday which tells of a man whom they carried to Jesus.

1. The bearers of this sick man had sympathy with his helpless condition, therefore they assisted him. They were Jews, knowing nothing of the great reward promised by Jesus for charity, nor of His threat of punishment for the uncharitable, and yet they willingly gave help and sympathy. If even these Jews were merciful to the sick, how much more does it behoove us to show mercy and love to them — we who have the new commandment of the Saviour: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John XIII, 34) and the assurance, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. V, 7). Indeed, it is our particular duty,

as Christians, to show to sick persons, especially to those of our own family, loving sympathy and concern and we commit sin if we do not care for them — if, instead of giving them our sympathy, we inflict upon them by our cold and perhaps cruel attitude even greater affliction than the disease does.

2. The right kind of sympathy is that shown by these men in the gospel. Their sympathy was not confined to words; no, they *helped* him as best they could. They carried him to Jesus that he might be cured. For us, too, dear brethren, it is not enough to cheer the sick person with words of sympathy, we must *help*, as far as it is in our power, by summoning a physician, by tending and ministering to him in the proper way, by letting him have fitting food and refreshments, and by affectionate attention to his needs. We are told by the Apostle: "But if any man have not care of his own and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (Tim. V, 8).

3. When these men brought the sick man to Jesus, He said to him: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee," and "Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house" (Matt. IX, 2, 6). The Saviour conferred an invaluable benefit upon this man by curing him of the palsy, but a greater benefit still by remitting his sins; since the soul is more valuable than the body, hence the sickness of the soul, sin, is more serious than sickness of the body. Therefore, if we desire to be truly merciful and charitable towards our sick, we must not care for their body alone, but also, and especially, for their soul. For this reason we should prevail on them in good time to receive the holy Sacraments, assist them as far as we can to be duly prepared for them, keep away everything that might excite their mind or even give occasion for sin,— such as impatience and anger, for instance, — we

should read prayers to them, not unnecessarily molest them with temporal affairs, and pray for them with fervour, lest they depart in sin, possibly by our fault. Let us follow this precept of Christian charity, dear brethren. Let us bestow upon the sick our love, care, and attention, both for body and soul, and avoid everything that might cause them grief or irritation. Let us in Christian charity care also, to the best of our ability, for the destitute sick, by letting them have food or alms, by visiting and consoling them, by praying for them. Put yourselves in their place and give them every love which you would like to be given by others. "All things, therefore, whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them," teaches the Saviour (Matt. V, 12). "As long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. XXV, 40). The Saviour regards every act of charity done to a fellow being as done unto Him, and He who has promised to remember the drink of water given for His sake, will give us rich reward. Now let us pray for our departed sister.

XXIII

THE WEDDING GARMENT

The king saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment (Matt. XXII, 11).

Dear brethren, we need not fear that our departed sister is among those who received the terrible sentence of the guest who came to the marriage without a wedding garment, as told in last Sunday's gospel: "Cast him into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. XXII, 13). On the contrary, we have reason to hope that, adorned in the garment of grace, she was admitted to the marriage feast, because, prior to her departure, she was cleansed from sin by the Holy Sacrament of Penance, and she died in the love of the Saviour, to whom she became united in the Holy Eucharist. We all wish to be admitted upon our death to the heavenly feast. To realize this wish, however, we must have ready our wedding garment, for if we should die, not having a wedding garment, ours will be the wretched fate of the unfortunate guest who was cast into outer darkness.

Now, what is this wedding garment, which we must have to enter the eternal feast? It consists, as St. Gregory tells us, of innocence, humility, and love. Innocence, free from sin, hence the possession of sanctifying grace, is the first and indispensable condition for admittance to the heavenly banquet: nothing unclean can enter there, a soul that enters the hereafter burdened with mortal sin will be cast into the "exterior darkness." Moreover, to be admitted to the heavenly feast, we must be humble, we must love God and

our neighbour. How, indeed, could God receive into His kingdom a man who proudly ignored God and mocked at His commandments? "God resisteth the proud" (Jas. IV, 6), and, "He that loveth not, abideth in death" (1. John III, 14), he will never gain eternal life.

The man in the parable had neglected to put on his wedding garment; hence, he was cast into the outer darkness. But how about ourselves? Have we this wedding garment, this very hour? Is our soul free from sin? The virtue of humility, is it ours? Can we truthfully declare that we love God and our neighbour? If the King of heaven were to summon us suddenly to the wedding feast of the spotless Lamb, could we hope to be worthy of being admitted? Alas, dear brethren, if the truth is to be told, we have cared more for money and possessions, for honour and clothes, for joy and pleasures, than for the garment of sanctifying grace: we are defiled by sin, we are proud and haughty, we have not loved God, we have even offended Him by violating His commandments. What would happen to us if the King of heaven were to appear suddenly? Would He not find many without the wedding garment? Could *we* offer the excuse of having been ignorant of the fact that the wedding garment is necessary for admittance to the heavenly banquet? We could not: for we *did* know; we have been told of it time and again, we have been admonished time and again to do penance, to obey the divine commandments. If we have not done so, if we lived without heed and without penance, it will be our own fault if, in the hour of death, we shall be excluded from the heavenly marriage feast, and cast into exterior darkness. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned," says the Saviour, "but now they have no excuse for their sins" (John XV, 22).

Dear brethren, there is yet time for us to obtain the wed-

ding garment of sanctifying grace; there is yet time for grace, for penance, and regeneration. We do not know how long this respite will be, whether God's forbearance may be at an end even to-day or to-morrow; the hour of death is surely nearer than we presume, and we know not whether we shall be granted the time and the grace to become reconciled to God at the hour of death, if before that hour we have neglected to make our peace with the Lord.

Hence, let us beware, before it is too late, before eternal misery and everlasting suffering shall befall us. Let us cleanse our soul from the blemishes of sin, let us adorn it with the virtues of humility, of love, and of all virtues that follow love, let us live entirely in our Lord Jesus Christ, so that when the hour of our departure from this life comes we may be able to appear before God without fear. Now let us pray for our deceased sister.

XXIV

THE WRONG WAY OF PROVIDING

Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice (MATT. VI, 33).

MY friends, we have committed to the grave a man who day by day, all through his life, had to work in the sweat of his brow to make ends meet. Yet, in all his labour and toil he never forgot his God, on whose blessing all depends, who never forsakes those who confide in Him, and he did not fail to walk before God in righteousness and holy fear. When, at last, his strength gave out and he was thrown upon the sick-bed, he looked to God and the crucified Saviour for comfort and for the strength to bear his sufferings in patience, and, in order to be fortified for the great journey into the hereafter, he received Holy Communion and Extreme Unction. This, my dear friends, is the right and proper provision to be made by the Christian. Alas, how rarely we find this proper forethought, how frequently we find a wrong way of providing.

1. Many Christians provide first for the temporal things, and for the eternal things last. We are not forbidden to provide for temporal things, we are even bidden to do so in a reasonable way. Many, however, are for ever asking, in the words of last Sunday's gospel: "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewith shall we be clothed?" This thought is uppermost in their minds, and in their haste to acquire worldly goods they often go to their work without having spoken

a word of prayer, without having made a good resolution, and then they toil and worry in the sweat of their brow till evening comes, when work ceases, and even then they keep on worrying and never find rest. Thus, during their entire life they never cease worrying and working, and are occupied even in their old age with nothing but providing for the temporal. And what are they doing for eternity? what to gain heaven? Alas! very little. At most their devotion on week-days is confined to saying the Lord's Prayer morning and evening, and that often without devotion: but during the day they give little or no thought to God. Should they be upbraided by their conscience, then the words of the gospel are fulfilled: "And they began all at once to make excuse. The first said to him: I have bought a farm and I must needs go out and see it; and another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to try them" (Luke XIV, 18). Not even Sundays and holidays are employed for the service of the Lord and for the salvation of the soul; they are passed in idle rest, in amusements, but not in receiving the holy Sacraments and in performing good deeds; at best they attend a brief Mass. Thus go the days and the years, and when death finally comes they have done nothing that would avail them for their salvation.

2. This wrong way of providing for temporal things first, and for eternal things last or not at all, is thoroughly wrong and fraught with danger to the soul. We are not forbidden by God to provide for the temporal; He even imposes it as a duty upon us, by bidding us: "Six days shalt thou labour and shalt do all thy works"; but He also warned us that our supreme duty is to provide for the eternal. "For God has not appointed us unto wrath, but unto the purchasing of salvation," says St. Paul (1. Thess. V, 9). This is why Holy Writ admonishes us to serve the Lord, to pursue righteous-

ness and sanctity, that we may attain this salvation. "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his justice," ordains the Saviour, and St. Paul admonishes: "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth" (Col. III, 1, 2). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1. Thess. IV, 3). These words prove that we must, first of all, provide for the eternal.

If we fail to do this, if entirely devoted to temporal things, then we are in danger to forfeit the eternal. Heaven is promised as a reward only to those who work in the service of the Lord, and who endeavour to become rich in good deeds. "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away," says the Saviour (Matt. XI, 12).

How, then, may we expect heavenly reward, if we have provided only for our temporal welfare, and done nothing to merit eternal reward? Only "a doer of the work shall be blessed in his deed," says St. James (I, 25).

Those who are over-anxious in the pursuit of temporal goods do very often not even succeed in that: they share the fate of Peter and his companions, who fished all night and caught nothing. We read in Holy Scripture: "There is an ungodly man who laboureth and maketh haste and is in sorrow, and so much the more in want" (Ecclus. XI, 11). The blessing of the Lord is not with him: hence, he cannot succeed. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. CXXVI, 1).

Hence, my dear brethren, let us not give undue care to temporal things; let us strive more for treasures that are not eaten by rust and moths, nor carried away by thieves. Temporal things are vain and perishable, we must leave them here when we die; they cannot give true happiness, neither here nor in the hereafter. "What must I do to gain eternal

life?" Let this be our question every morning of our lives, and let us endeavour to merit the reward of heaven, by following the divine commandments, by perseverance in virtue and in righteousness. Let us now pray that our departed brother may reap the reward for his works, etc.

XXV

THE FEVERS OF THE SOUL

At the seventh hour the fever left him (John IV, 52).

My brethren, like the son of the ruler of Capernaum, of whom we were told in last Sunday's gospel, our departed brother had been sick with fever. The Saviour made that young man whole in *body* by His Almighty Word: our brother was made whole in *soul* by the same divine Lord, by the worthy reception of the holy Sacraments. Men are often suffering from violent fevers of the body, they die of them; but oftener still the souls of men are diseased with the fever of passions, which cause their spiritual and eternal death.

St. Andrew enumerates various kinds of such fevers of the soul. There is the fever called covetousness: those stricken with it work incessantly to acquire wealth. There is another dangerous fever, raging among young and old; it is the fever of concupiscence. Another such fever is revengefulness. Others are intemperance, dishonesty, and so on; in fact, almost everybody is inclined more or less to one or the other of these fevers of the soul.

My friends, have we ever inquired whether we suffer from one kind or the other of the fevers that may bring eternal death to the soul? The fever, for instance, with which so many are stricken, and which differs from other kinds by increasing with age, namely, covetousness. The covetous man never gets enough; no matter how wealthy he is, he is ever tortured by the insatiable desire for more, and to gratify this desire he sometimes does not stop at dishonesty. Hence the

Apostle says: "For they that will become rich, fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires which drown men into destruction and perdition" (1. Tim. VI, 9). And the Saviour warns us that "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. XIX, 24). Again, there is intemperance; it ruins the health of the body and soul, leads to vice, to dispute and quarrel, to neglect of duty and many other sins: it is a fever difficult to cure. Hence the Saviour admonishes us: "Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness" (Luke XXI, 34), and St. Paul includes drunkards among those who shall not possess the kingdom of God. A very dangerous fever is concupiscence, the disorderly desire for carnal gratification. Often neither law, reason, nor religion, is capable of checking the unchaste in his filthy ways. "For know ye this, and understand," says the Apostle, "that no unclean person hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph. V, 5).

Dear brethren, if our body is shaken by a violent fever, we at once summon the physician and take the proper remedies to soon regain health. If conscience tells us that our soul, infinitely more precious than the body, is stricken with one of those fevers of sin, is it not our duty to take measures even more promptly to regain the health of our soul, to escape eternal death? Take pity on your immortal soul; let it not die of the fever of covetousness, drunkenness, or lust, or of any other fever of sin. Go to confession, and tell your confessor the particular sickness of your soul, and follow conscientiously his instructions. Resolve earnestly, this very day, to fight the fever of your soul, by means of repentance, watchfulness, self-denial, and prayer. Let us pray for the deceased.

XXVI

SOW IN THE SPIRIT

What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap (Gal. VI, 8).

This saying of the Apostle is true in the things of this life, for we know that the tiller of the soil reaps only those fruits of which he has sown the seed. The words of the Apostle are fully as true in regard to spiritual things. Of that which man has sown by the deeds of his earthly life, he often reaps part here, but more fully and most surely will he reap it in the hereafter. Happiness and an everlasting blessed life he will reap if he has sown good works: misery and eternal perdition, if he has sown evil deeds: "for he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption" (Ibid.). It means: he who in this life only desires and does that which is pleasing to the flesh, to the senses, that which gives him sensual satisfaction, and who ignores God and does not observe His commandments, who knows "no other law than that of his members" (Rom. VII, 23), who only thinks of that which is suggested to him by the desires of the flesh — he is sowing for the flesh, and he will reap no other reward than the one that flesh is possessed of, and that is decay and corruption. Even in this world the servant of the flesh, the slave to sensual lust and desires, will reap disgrace and remorse, shame, often poverty, disease, and usually a premature death. But the bitterest fruit of his wretched sowing he will reap beyond the grave, where eternal suffering and everlasting despair await him.

Comforting and blessed will be the harvest of those who in

this life sow in the spirit. "But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting," says St. Paul (Gal. VI, 8). What does sowing in the spirit mean? It means to hold in check the improper desires and the passions, and to combat them incessantly; it means to turn away mind and heart from worldly things and to turn them to the imperishable and everlasting, to submit one's will in humility to the Will of God, to conform in all things to the teachings of the gospel. To sow in the spirit means, also, the promotion of God's honour as far as this is in our power, and to resist evil as much as we have the opportunity. This is what is meant by sowing in the spirit, and whosoever sows in this way shall reap life everlasting; indeed, he will reap even in this world a reward, namely, peace of conscience, a cheerful mind, the respect of righteous persons, health, a happy death, and after death life everlasting and inexpressible joy and pleasure in the glory of God.

My brethren, what a difference in the harvest reaped by those who sow in the flesh and those that sow in the spirit! How glorious and joyful the one harvest, how bitter and ignominious the other! Oh, my brethren, on the day of harvest, the sinner will see his delusion and realize too late that the things which appeared so pleasing to his sensuality were nothing but a delusion and a snare. Then, in his despair, he will curse the hours and moments when, instead of doing the works of God, he did the works of the flesh. What a blissful rapture, on the other hand, will the virtuous experience on his day of reaping! He looks back upon his sowing, often done under hardship and tears, then looks at the fruit, and he sees fulfilled the words of the psalmist: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. CXXV, 5).

One of these two harvests, my dear brethren, will be the lot of everyone of us. Which one of the two would you wish

for yourself? Undoubtedly the one that yields joys and blessings even in this life and after death life everlasting. But have you sown in the spirit so as to reap the everlasting glory of the spirit? Might you have hoped for this blessed reaping if *you* had been laid into this grave, instead of our brother?

Dear brethren, here, at the grave of our brother, let us ask ourselves, before God, our future Judge, whether we have sown hitherto good or evil, in the spirit or in the flesh. If you find that you have sowed sin and evil, oh, begin at once, ere death put a stop to it, to sow good seed, think and speak nothing but good, do nothing but good, sow in the spirit, then you will enjoy even in this life the sweet fruits of your sowing, and in the hereafter you will reap the joys of everlasting life.

Our departed friend has endeavoured to sow in the spirit; hence we may hope that he is now enjoying everlasting life. But let us pray.

XXVII

ABOUT SICKNESS

Lazarus was sick, his sisters therefore sent to the Lord, saying: Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick (John XI, 13).

We are told, dear brethren, that the Saviour, when in Bethania, liked to stay at the house of Lazarus; that He loved Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. Yet these friends of the Lord were not immune against earthly afflictions. Lazarus took sick, and he became so ill that the sisters feared the worst. They knew at once where to find help; they turned to their truest and mighty Friend, and they sent Him this message: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." In confidence they left everything further to Him, knowing that His was the power to help, the wisdom to know what was best, and the love that makes haste to help. And while things came somewhat different than they expected, the result was glorious, through darkness to light, through sorrow to salvation, through death to resurrection.

What happened in the house at Bethania has also happened in the house of this departed, and it will occur sooner or later in every other house. A dear member of the family falls sick, he dies, is laid to rest, and awaits there the day of his resurrection.

This induces me to speak a few words of physical suffering and sickness, and to advise you what to do in sickness.

1. "Great labor is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their mother's womb, until the day of their burial into the mother of all " (Ecclus. XL, 1). The real cause and origin

of all evil, of pain and sickness, even of death, is not, as the godless claim, nature, or the violation of natural forces, but sin, for, as the Apostle says: "As by one man sin entered into this world and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned" (Rom. V, 12).

This is the hard lot imposed upon us by the sin of Adam. Numerous afflictions beset the short course of this life, and the end of it is death; for the fall of the first man was, since we descend from him, also our fall, his sin was our sin, his punishment was our punishment. To this law there is no exception; even the most perfect man, and the most virtuous, will finally succumb to death. I do not mean to say, by any means, that all disease, all suffering, is the immediate consequence of original sin; on the contrary, if all men would lead a pure, temperate, virtuous life, the larger part of the diseases we know would not exist. Many diseases, much suffering and pain, are the consequence of individual sins. Indeed, it seems that each kind of mortal sin has its own peculiar diseases, for there are diseases due to anger, to envy and jealousy, to drunkenness and gluttony, to immorality, which includes sins which the Apostle forbids to be even mentioned by Christians, but which are so fatal in their effects that this vice has been termed the coffin of the human race. When the man sick of the palsy for many years was carried to the Saviour, He said: "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," and then only He said: "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." And to dispel all doubt of the fact that the sickness was the result of the man's sins, He said to him: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee" (John V, 14). Even in the Old Testament we read: "He that sinneth in the sight of His Maker, shall fall into the hands of the physician" (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 15). Happy the sick and suffering who, when stricken by the hand of God, rest their

confidence in the Lord, as St. Augustine did, who exclaimed: "My God and my Jesus, I am sick and cry to the physician, I am miserable because of my sins, and flee to thy mercy, I am dead and sigh for life. Jesus of Nazareth, take pity on me." Happy those who in sickness, as our departed sister did, turn to the greatest of all physicians, He who descended from heaven to earth, to whom the physicians of this world owe their existence and knowledge, without whose blessing all the skill of the worldly physicians and all our remedies are fruitless and in vain. And this indicates what to do in case of sickness.

2. Unfortunately, there are many people who in sickness do not know of any other remedies but those for sale in drug stores. True, it is God's will for us to use in sickness these remedies, because His power and mercy have endowed them with healing power. Holy Writ says: "Honour the physician for the need thou hast of him: for the most High hath created him, the most High hath created medicine out of the earth, and a wise man will not abhor them" (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 1, 4). But we read there also (IX, 10): "My son, in thy sickness neglect not thyself, but pray to the Lord and he shall heal thee. Turn away from sin and order thy hands aright, and cleanse thy heart from all offence." The skill of the physician, the virtue of medicines, will be more successful when the sick person has the peace of a good conscience, and is free from the anguish, fear, sadness, and confusion of unremitted sin. Therefore it is the will of the holy Church, our loving Mother, that a person stricken with dangerous sickness shall receive the holy Sacraments, so that, having made his peace with God by the worthy reception of the holy Sacraments, the patient may be enabled to seek help and comfort in prayer to the Lord over life and death, conforming to the words of the Holy Ghost: "My Son, cleanse thy heart, then supplicate

the Lord and he shall make thee whole," and only a mind in peace with God can pray with confidence. What such confident prayer may do in sickness is seen in the story of Ezechias, King of Juda. Being sick to death, he was told by Isaias that he must die. "Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die, and not live," said the Prophet. Then the King wept and prayed, and the Lord bade Isaias return to Ezechias and tell him: "Thus saith the Lord; I have heard thy prayer and I have seen thy tears and behold I have healed thee; on the third day thou shalt go up to the temple of the Lord" (4. Kings XX).

Dear brethren, sickness and death will spare no one of us. If we fall sick, let us make use of the natural remedies, but let us be sure not to neglect also the spiritual remedies, that we may prevail before the judgment of God, should the sickness prove fatal. Let us do, as our departed sister did, make our peace with God in due time, by worthily receiving the holy Sacraments, and then we may follow the example of King Ezechias in praying to the Lord over life and death, that He may give us back our health, or else grant us the grace of a good death. If He gives us back our health, let us thank Him for it, and avoid henceforth sin, lest something worse happen to us. Let us live at all times according to the divine law, so that we may be ready for the judgment, if death should take us unawares. Though we have good reason to hope that our departed sister has been granted that grace and mercy, let us pray for her in the spirit of charity.

XXVIII

OUR DUTY IN SICKNESS

My son in thy sickness neglect not thyself, but pray to the Lord and he shall heal thee. Turn away from sin and order thy hands aright and cleanse thy heart from all offence (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 9, 10).

As the day of death came to our departed brother, so will come for us the day when we must part from our dear ones. That day is usually ushered in by sickness, and one of our illnesses will be our last one. Though the disease may scourge the body, and fill the soul with anxiety, it will become a blessing, and will change sadness into good cheer, if we employ the hours of sickness as God desires us to do. What, then, are we to do when taken sick?

1. At the beginning of any sickness let us directly seek our refuge in God. "My son," says Holy Scripture, "in thy sickness neglect not thyself, but pray to the Lord and he shall heal thee. Turn away from sin and order thy hands aright and cleanse thy heart from all offence" (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 9, 10). Hence, as soon as we take sick, we should pray to the Lord for the recovery of our health; first of all, however, we should cleanse our heart from sin, by receiving the Holy Sacrament of Penance; for our prayer is more likely to be granted if it comes from a heart free from sin, according to the words inspired by the Holy Ghost: "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he will hear the prayers of the just" (Prov. XV, 29). If the heart is in sin, it will lack the confidence so much needed in sickness. If the heart is pure, then, even if our sickness should prove fatal, we shall be able to meet death serenely and with resignation, because we are rec-

onciled to God through the receipt of the holy Sacraments. If even a person in the best of health should always be prepared for death, how much more is this true of the sick person! If we should fail, when sick, to take refuge in God, to make peace with Him by receiving the holy Sacraments, and our sickness should suddenly prove fatal, what would happen? "The death of the wicked is very evil" is the answer given by Holy Writ. "When the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more" (Ps. XXXIII, 22; Prov. II, 7). Hence, if we duly care for our salvation, and are desirous of dying a good, holy death, then we must seek refuge in God forthwith; and—

2. We must remain patient and steadfast during the course of our sickness. Nothing does more harm to a sick person than impatience — not only physical harm, because of wasted strength, but also spiritual harm, because then the soul does not only forego the merits to be gained by being patient, but it becomes burdened with fault. Hence, if God should send us sickness, let us willingly accept it from His hand and endure its pains with patience. St. Paul tells us: "For patience is necessary for you, that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Heb. X, 36). "To bear sickness with patience," advises St. Bede, "will save us from purgatory, because then it will serve as temporal penalty for our sins." In order to gain strength for such patience we should think of our sins, which may have deserved a harder punishment than the pains of our sickness. Let us, then, thank the Lord for cleansing us through affliction, and for affording us an opportunity to gather merits for the hereafter. A prayer in humility and confidence will gain us the grace of patience, for "the Lord directs your hearts in the charity of God and the patience of Christ," says the Apostle (2. Thess. III, 5). Indeed, Christ Himself, in His bitter passion and death, has

given us the most beautiful example of patience, which we should try and imitate in the days of sickness. Hence, St. Paul exhorts us: "Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before him, endured the cross . . . Think diligently upon him . . . that you not be wearied, fainting in your minds" (Heb. XII, 2, 3). And St. James says: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he has been proved he shall receive the crown of life, which God has promised to them that love him" (James I, 12).

If death should at last come, then we shall accept it resignedly from God's hand. He alone knows what is best for us. Die we must, what does it much matter *when*, since all depends finally upon a good and blessed death, and this we shall accomplish by a death in faith, hope, and charity, cleansed from sin, fortified by Holy Communion, and by the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth, says the spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13).

Such, my brethren, was the death of our departed brother, who could say with David: "My heart is ready, Oh God, my heart is ready" (Ps. LVI, 8). We may hope, therefore, that he died the death of the righteous. Let us, too, when visited with sickness, cleanse, first of all, our heart from sin, fortify ourselves with the Sacraments of the Church, bear patiently the afflictions of sickness, leave the matter of life or death to Divine Providence, after we have done our share. May all our thoughts and actions be guided by the wish to die the death of the righteous; for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. CXV, 16). Now let us pray for the deceased.

XXIX

THE DEATH-BED

For there is a time when thou must fall in the physician's hand (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 13).

You know, my dear brethren, that our departed sister, who died fortified by the holy rites of the Church and resigned to God's holy Will, was sick for a long time, suffering intense pain which the skill of the physician could hardly alleviate. There will be a time for everyone of us when we fall into the hands of the physician, unless ours be a sudden death which God may graciously prevent. If the physician is not able to cure our sickness, then the sick-bed becomes our death-bed. To this we usually give little thought; yet it is wholesome for us, even in the days of good health, to frequently imagine ourselves on the death-bed, and this shall be the subject of our present meditation.

1. Death is, as a rule, preceded by sickness. It is often a time of bitter woe for the poor patient. Put yourself in his place. His body tortured by pains, no sleep at night, the sight of food nauseating to him, he is helpless, the worry about his affairs and his family increases his sufferings. He moans and begs for alleviation and help, but all remedies fail to relieve the pain: the days pass by, each day more bitter than the previous one, until finally comes the greatest agony, the struggle with death. In some cases the patient departs from this life as if in a peaceful slumber, hardly feeling the departure of the soul from the body, but more frequently the struggle between life and death is full of anguish and intense pain,

indeed, the agony is often so heartrending that the bystanders are horrified at the sight.

Yet more intense than even this physical pain is the pain of the soul.

On his death-bed man is, as it were, between two worlds — the world he must leave and the world he must enter. Frightened he looks backward over the past life and forward to the future life. What does he see looking backward? Even if he has led a Christian life, he does not feel entirely free from fault: he sees many violations of duty, many deeds of self-love; he might have served the Lord more faithfully, might have increased his claims upon eternal reward; his soul is saddened by this thought, and he grows faint-hearted. What, then, does he see on his death-bed if he has led an *unchristian* life? He sees things that will make him tremble, things that will fill his heart with terror. His evil deeds, his violations of divine laws, arise before him. He sees the wrong he has done to others, the enmities he has kept up, his unchaste actions. He sees his numerous neglects of duties, the countless offences he has given; in brief, he sees all his many sins, and "fear seizes upon him and trembling, and all his bones are affrighted" (Job IX, 14).

And looking to his future, more anguish will take hold of his soul. Even the righteous feels uncertain of prevailing before the Lord, "who judges justly and tries the reins and the hearts" (Jer. XI, 20), and who "will render to a man his work, and according to the ways of every one he will reward them" (Job, XXXIV, 11). The righteous will ask himself: May I hope to find mercy before the eternal Judge, or must I fear that my works, when weighed in the balance of justice, will be found wanting? If thus even the righteous looks forward to eternity with anxiety, who may picture the anguish and horror that will overcome the soul of the sinner, when he

realizes that soon he will be called, with all his sins and vices, before the Judge, who will reward every man according to his works?

"And if the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1. Pet. IV, 18).

2. Such, my brethren, is the woe of the death-bed, and this woe will befall everyone of us, sooner or later. "For it is appointed unto man once to die." Where may we then find comfort? Where else but in our Lord and Saviour, since, in the words of the Apostle, "of God is made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification and redemption" (1. Cor. I, 30). By contemplating the sufferings endured by the spotless Lamb of God, the sick man is induced to bear his bodily pains with patience, and confidence in the merits of the Crucified will bring him pardon for his sins, if he contritely confesses them. He finds consolation in the truth that his Redeemer is the God of infinite love, of whom it is written that "a bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not extinguish" (Matt. XII, 20); that his Redeemer "is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke XIX, 10); that his Redeemer pardoned Mary Magdalen and promised paradise to the repenting thief. And when the patient through the holy Sacraments has received sanctifying grace, he will die in peace, in the confidence of receiving the reward promised by the Lord to those who love Him; and he may exclaim with the Apostle: "I have a desire to be dissolved and to be with God" (Phil. I, 23).

If you, my friends, wish this comfort to be yours when once you lie upon your death-bed — and who would not wish it? — then take to heart the exhortation of the Saviour: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice" (Matt. VI, 33). Aim, first of all, at heaven, and practise the virtues of justice, humility, meekness, chastity, patience,

and charity, and if your soul be oppressed by the consciousness of having given offence to God, do penance forthwith, and return to God; for "the Lord desireth not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez. XXXIII, 11). Let us now pray for the deceased.

XXX

THE HOLY VIATICUM

And if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way (Mark VIII, 3).

Our departed sister, whose mortal remains we have returned to the earth, died a Christian death; it was granted to her to acquire merit by patiently enduring the sufferings of a long sickness, and to receive shortly before her death the Holy Eucharist as Viaticum, after she had in the course of sickness often received this Holy Sacrament. Would to God that this grace be also ours, my dear brethren! For the words which the Saviour in His compassion said, when He fed the multitude: "If I shall send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint on the way," also concern us, for we all shall some day have to undertake this journey, because "man shall go into the house of Eternity" (Eccl. II, 5), says Holy Writ. How great, therefore, our need of strength! For this purpose the merciful God, who does not want us to faint on the way, has provided the Holy Viaticum, which bestows upon us the graces necessary (1) for dying a good death, and (2) for life everlasting.

1. The Holy Viaticum bestows upon us the graces for dying a good death. It often happens, indeed, that the patient is restored to health by the Holy Viaticum, which is Christ Jesus, the greatest Physician, who during His life on earth healed many infirmities and diseases, so that even those who but touched His garment were made whole. What He did then He can do now, and, indeed, He does it; for He is

"Jesus Christ yesterday and to-day and the same for ever" (Heb. XIII, 9).

When sin, the cause of sickness, is removed by sincere reception of the Bread of Life, there often is removed also the disease. While this does not always happen, the Holy Viaticum is in all cases a great comfort to the sick. When in sickness our sufferings have become so intense that there is no earthly comfort left, where else can we turn than to the "God of all comfort?" "For, as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ doth our comfort abound" (2. Cor. 1, 3, 5). He who devoutly receives Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist is given the grace to suffer in patience for His sake, and he receives comfort and alleviation; "the Lord helps him on his bed of sorrow" (Ps. XLI, 3). And since Jesus promises, "Come *to me*, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. XI, 28), will He not do this all the more, when, in the Holy Eucharist, He comes *to us*. And He will also calm our dread of death.

Fear and trembling come upon man when death approaches to rob him of his earthly possessions, of friends and relatives, even of his body; but St. Cyrillus says: "It is impossible for death to resist Him, who is the life himself, Jesus Christ, who has brought us life and immortality, and who has given us in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar the bread of life, so that one partaking of it need not fear death." Strengthened by the Bread of life, the early Christians underwent cheerfully the most cruel martyrdom.

The Holy Viaticum, finally, bestows the fulness of inner graces. It bestows the grace of perfect penitence. The patient has made his peace with God in the Sacrament of Penance, and the sanctifying grace thus received will be even increased by the Holy Eucharist, suffering for the sake of God is made more meritorious, the soul's resistance

to sin will be strengthened. The patient has partaken of a banquet of love, instituted by the God of love Himself. It gives Him also the grace of perseverance, to resist victoriously all temptations and attacks of the Evil One. This is expressed in the words of the priest when giving the Holy Viaticum: "Receive the Viaticum of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which shall protect thee against the Evil One and guide thee to life everlasting."

2. The Holy Viaticum gives us not only the graces for a good death, but also the grace to receive everlasting life. He who intends to journey to a distant country makes his preparations in time; he secures letters of introduction. What better introduction can we offer upon entering eternity than the Holy Viaticum which is "the pledge of life everlasting?" The Saviour gives us the assurance: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath life everlasting, and I will raise him up in the last day" (John VI, 55).

On our last journey we need, more than anything else, a safe-conduct. With the Bread of life we receive "the Lord of Hosts, whom the angels are serving." Angels were painted on the Ark of the Covenant, to indicate that angels are always near the sanctuary of the Lord: may we not be sure that ministering angels come to the sick-room with the Holy Viaticum, to take care of the soul of the dying and to conduct him into eternity? This also is expressed in the prayer spoken by the priest when giving the Holy Viaticum: "Hear us, Oh Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, and send graciously down from heaven thy holy angels, to watch, to save, to defend, to visit and protect all those dwelling in this place, through Christ our Lord."

When entering eternity, we wish to find a merciful Judge. Who, then, is the Judge but Jesus Christ? Who will not fear to appear before His judgment seat, especially those who

have been in their sins the adversaries of this Judge? The Saviour counsels: "Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him: lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison" (Matt. V, 25). After our death Jesus is the stern Judge; in our life He is the loving Friend.

He who worthily receives Jesus in the Holy Viaticum has become reconciled to Him, and he has made a friend of the Judge.

In entering eternity, finally, we wish for a strong advocate. No matter how holy the life he has led, no man may claim to be quite without blame, no man may rely solely upon his own merits before God. Here, again, it is Jesus, received in the Holy Sacrament, who supports us with His merits. "If any man sin," says the evangelist, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just: and he is the propitiation for our sins" (John I, 2).

Thus you see, my dear friends, that we receive in the Holy Viaticum the fulness of graces for a peaceful death and for life everlasting; hence, in the words of St. Lawrence, the Holy Viaticum is the surest pledge of eternal beatitude. Oh, how foolish, how careless, how inexcusable are those, who, when critically ill, postpone the receipt of the Holy Eucharist until they are scarcely able to receive it worthily, or perhaps die without receiving it!

And what cruelty on the part of relatives, who in false sentiment hide from the sick his state of danger, causing him to die without having received the holy Sacraments, or to receive them so late, that he is unable to prepare for a worthy reception! Never be guilty of this great sin. You would have to answer for it before the judgment seat of the Lord. If one of your family should fall sick, let your first care be to

prevail upon him to receive the Holy Viaticum. It may lead to his recovery. But even should this not be the case, he will, at any rate, obtain the grace to die peacefully and to live eternally. If one of you should fall sick, turn to the Lord without fail, do not put off preparing for the great and dangerous journey by worthily receiving the Holy Viaticum, lest death surprise you. But if you desire to receive the Holy Sacrament worthily in your hour of death, you must receive it often during your lives, and receive it with the same fervour as if it were your last Viaticum. Let us pray for the deceased.

XXXI

EXTREME UNCTION

Is any man sick among you, let him bring in the priests of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (Jas. V, 14).

Our deceased brother has succumbed to his lingering illness, during which he repeatedly received the holy Sacraments of Penance and of the Altar, yet it was not granted to him to receive the Holy Sacrament of Extreme Unction. He did not consider his condition critical and hoped for recovery. But death took him suddenly. His fate is the fate of many sick. They do not heed in time the advice of St. James: "Is any man sick among you, let him bring in the priests of his church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with the oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him" (Jas. V, 14, 15). People often have the false idea that death must surely follow the administration of Extreme Unction. This is not so; on the contrary this Sacrament bestows not only grace, comfort, and relief, but sometimes brings about a speedy recovery. The great importance of Extreme Unction I wish to point out to you to-day for your serious consideration.

1. At no time in life is man more in need of consolation, of peace, and of help than in the days of his sickness. When, racked by pain, the body lies on the bed, then the delusions of life are dispelled, and the heart is in dread of eternity. The patient's mind is in sadness at the thought of having to part from his family, from his possessions, from everything he valued and cherished on earth; and when he finally realizes that death is nigh, and with it the judgment, when he will

have to render an accounting to a stern Judge, then he is seized with anguish; he longs for comfort and encouragement. Where may he seek and find this? Where else but with the Saviour, who said: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (Matt. XI, 28). Jesus Christ, man's truest Friend, who offers help in all situations and conditions of life, would not leave His faithful without comfort and help in the last and most trying hour of life; hence He instituted a special Sacrament for the sick and dying, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which, through anointment with the holy oil and the prayer of the priest, imparts to the sick the grace of God for the welfare of the soul, and often also for the welfare of the body. The purpose of this Sacrament is defined by the words of St. James, and the Church has declared at the Council of Trent that "He who says, Extreme Unction be not a true and veritable Sacrament instituted by Christ our Lord, and testified to by St. James the Apostle, but only a traditional custom, or a human invention, he be excommunicated."

2. The effects of the Sacrament are also described by St. James: they are beneficial to the soul and body. The sick, having already been justified by the Sacrament of Penance, becomes even more just and holy through Extreme Unction. The Sacrament brings also remission of sin, for St. James says: "if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him." Commenting thereon, St. Thomas Aquinas says: "It may happen that there remains after confession a mortal sin, because the dying person may not have been conscious of it, or was not able to confess it; this sin is removed by this Sacrament; thus the case may happen that beatitude is gained through this Sacrament by one who otherwise would have been lost." Extreme Unction worthily received will in any case remove venial sins, and temporal punishment for sins already remitted.

Extreme Unction, finally, fortifies the patient in his sufferings and temptations, and especially in the death struggle; for St. James says: "the Lord shall raise him up" and the Council of Trent teaches: "Extreme Unction relieves and fortifies the soul of the sick, by awakening in him a great confidence in the divine mercy; thus he will be uplifted, to better endure the troubles and hardships of sickness, and to resist better the temptations of the devil."

Extreme Unction often brings relief in sickness, and, indeed, sometimes entire recovery. St. James says: "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man." True, many receive Extreme Unction without recovering their health. Extreme Unction has for its chief object the welfare of the soul; the health of the body is only a secondary consideration, subordinate to the chief object, and restored only if God so wills it, and if salutary for the sick one.

Such, my dear brethren, are the effects of Extreme Unction. In the dreadful last moments of life, when we may think ourselves forsaken by everyone, Jesus comes to our assistance with a Sacrament of healing power. He pardons our remaining sins, He makes our physical sufferings endurable, and soothes our oppressed and faint heart with the balm of heavenly comfort and divine strength, that we may depart hopefully and peacefully in the grace of God.

Let us thank God for His tender love. Let us also profit of this love by receiving Extreme Unction in proper time and with great devotion. Let us not be deceived by the dangerous delusion that those who receive this Sacrament will surely die, let us not forfeit a means of salvation without which many will be in greater danger of succumbing in their last battle with the devil. Hence, if you should fall sick to-day or to-morrow, remember the words of St. James: "Is any man sick among you? etc." Now let us pray for the deceased.

XXXII

THE MASS FOR THE DEAD

A gift has grace in the sight of all the living; but restrain not grace from the dead (Eccl. VII, 37).

St. Monica, on her death-bed, summoned her two sons, Navigius and Augustine, before her and said: "When I am dead, bury this body and do not mourn. But grant me one prayer: Remember me at the altar of the Lord." She had always found a rich source of comfort in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and hoped to obtain through it her delivery from purgatory, if she should not be found worthy to be admitted at once to the kingdom of God. Our departed sister also died with a strong belief in the efficiency of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and it was her last wish that her surviving children should arrange for Masses to be read for her soul, and to remember her soul whenever attending Mass. She had every reason for this belief. For Holy Mass is the continuance and unbloody renewal of the great Sacrifice of Atonement, rendered to His heavenly Father by Jesus when He gave His life for the salvation of all men. There is no difference between Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the altar, except that one was offered on the Cross as a bloody sacrifice, whereas the other is offered on the altar without the shedding of blood. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is identical in its benefits with Christ's sacrifice of atonement on the Cross, and since the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, hence, also, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is a sacrifice of atonement for all children of God, I ask: Are His children only those still in this life? Are not those His children, also, who have died in His grace?

Has Jesus died His death of atonement for the living only, and not for those who died while in the state of grace, yet burdened with minor faults? No, my dear brethren, according to the teaching of the Church, it is an atoning sacrifice for the dead also, a sacrifice by virtue of which they are cleansed from remaining blemishes, and are granted remission of such temporal penalties for their sins as they did not expiate during life. Hence, it was customary even in the early days of the Church to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the dead. "We are praying for the dead," says St. Cyprian, "and sacrifice Jesus Christ for their sake, that God may be gracious and merciful to them." St. Chrysostom states: "Already in the days of the Apostles, it was ordered and not without good reason, to remember the dead in the Holy Sacrifice: for when priests and faithful offer this Sacrifice of Atonement, how can it be possible for God, not to hear the prayers also for those who have died in the faith and in His love?"

This was at all times the view of the Church regarding the benefit which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass yields for the dead, and the Council of Trent, when proclaiming that there is a purgatory, proclaimed also that the souls in purgatory may be aided by prayer, and especially by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Hence, my brethren, do not deny this aid to your dead, do not deny this aid to your departed relatives, friends, and acquaintances. "A gift has grace in the sight of all the living," says Holy Scripture, "but restrain not grace from the dead." The dead are in great need of your help; the souls suffering in purgatory are poor souls indeed; they are undergoing sufferings, bitter sufferings, partly to atone for lesser sins, partly because in life they failed to expiate the temporal penalties for past sins. In purgatory they are being cleansed by the punishment they undergo there, and they do not know

when the longed-for day will come when they shall be admitted into the presence of God, nor have they any means of their own to alleviate their suffering, to shorten their term. But what they cannot do, you can accomplish by prayers, by good works, and, especially, through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Hence, remember the poor souls at every Holy Mass, and beseech God that He may be merciful to them for the sake of Christ's merits, and that He may soon admit them into His presence.

In view of the long and bitter sufferings which souls have to endure in purgatory to atone for lesser sins and for neglect of penance, should we not feel impelled to avoid henceforth not only mortal sins, but also lesser sins, to be urged on to greater zeal in doing good, so that we may escape purgatory and its punishments? Too little importance is usually attributed to venial sins. How lukewarm and remiss we are in doing good! If we should die to-day or to-morrow, where would *our* souls go? Answer this question for yourself. If your conscience tells you that your soul is burdened with grave sin, oh, do not postpone your penance; for unknown to you is the hour of your death. If your conscience tells you that your soul is defiled with venial sins, you must sincerely repent of them too. Be zealous in doing good, and seek your refuge in the treasures of grace offered by indulgences, so that you need not make up in the hereafter by great suffering for what you have neglected to do in this life.

In offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for our departed sister, let us pray for her and for all other departed who were near and dear to us. Let us think also of ourselves, and let us pray to God that He may fill us with a horror of sin, and that He may grant us the spirit of penance. Let us now pray for the departed.

XXXIII

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

"Lord, give unto her eternal rest"; thus we pray to-day at this grave, as we do at each funeral; thus we speak when remembering the dead in prayer. We cannot know whether the souls of the departed have already entered heaven, or must first be cleansed in purgatory, and, therefore, Christian charity obliges us to remember the dead, and to pray that God in His mercy may shorten their penalties, alleviate their torments, and admit them soon into His presence.

Terrible, indeed, are the tortures which the poor souls undergo in purgatory. "The least of the pains which the poor souls are suffering in purgatory," says St. Anselm, "is infinitely greater than the worst torture that human cruelty has ever invented, or could invent; for God's justice is punishing these souls, and makes them expiate offences they committed in life against God. While the souls in purgatory suffer so severely, they do not know the day when they will be admitted into heaven; worse still, they have no means at hand to speed this day; for night has come upon them, when none can work. Their time for personal merit has ceased. With the last breath of life that what has not been done then can no longer be done; whatever has been neglected then can no longer be accomplished. Poor souls they are indeed . . . the poorest of the poor on earth is not so wretched as they are, for he can do penance for his sins and work for his salvation; but they are helpless; bound upon the rack, they

must endure the scourging until they have atoned for all their sins and shortcomings."

But we can come to their aid, mindful of the words of the Apostle: "Have compassion on them that are in bonds" (Heb. X, 34), and because the Church has taught, since the times of the Apostles, that the faithful may speed the delivery of the dead from purgatory by devout prayer, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, by alms, indulgences, and other good works. This is the reason why we pray for the dead, why we offer Holy Masses for the peace of their souls, why we give alms for their comfort, why we give them the benefit of indulgences and of Holy Communions: we know by our faith, that, for the sake of these good works, the merciful Lord will be gracious to the poor souls, mitigate their pains, and shorten their sentence.

Hence, dear friends, you who are mourning the loss of a good mother, sister, or other kin, I advise you, in the words of St. Ambrose: "I believe we should bewail the dead less and say more prayers for them: tears avail them not; recommend their souls to the Lord by prayers and sacrifice; it is thus that you may benefit them. Brighten the remembrance of the dead with the evergreen of good works and the roses of prayer. This is the most beautiful wreath to lay upon the graves of your beloved."

To-day we pray for our departed sister, that God may have mercy on her soul. And pray for her not only to-day, but often, as well as for your other deceased relatives and friends. "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they be loosed from sins" (2. Mach. XII, 46). And do not fail to think of your own salvation. Ask yourselves: If I should die to-day or to-morrow, where would I go? And should your conscience tell you that your sins would call for severest punishment, then tarry not, be-

seech the Lord to pardon your sins, try and pay the temporal penalties for your sins here by works of penance. "Work your salvation, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John IX, 4). We shall now pray for the departed.

XXXIV

PREPARING FOR DEATH

Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live (4. Kings XX, 1).

Anyone intending to go on an extended journey to a distant country will carefully make his plans and preparations, for a journey of this kind must be well considered, many things will have to be arranged and provided for before the departure. The route will be carefully chosen, as well as the proper road to travel by; leave will be taken from family and friends, and, of course, the means for the journey, will have been provided, as no one would wish to start with insufficient means, let alone with empty pocket. And a certain journey into a distant country will some day be made by everyone of us. When our pilgrimage on earth is ended, our soul will journey to the land of the Great Beyond. This, our last and by all means our most important trip, decisive for all eternity, the trip from this life to the other world — must it not call for most earnest preparation? We know the land where after death the delivered soul will be conducted by the angels of the Lord. Eternity is not a land unknown, it has become our true home through the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and every good Christian makes it the destination of his pilgrimage, the comfort of his earthly sufferings, and the goal of all his aims.

Hence, let us not tarry — for there must be no tarrying. Here, this day, we hear the voice of God, let not your heart be hardened. Whether to-morrow will belong to us, who

can tell? This death, which has brought us to this place, is a warning call of the Lord, to think of our own death, and to prepare earnestly and conscientiously for it.

To Ezechias, the King of Juda, the Prophet Isaias came and brought him this message of the Lord God: "Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die." Imagine this message were given to you, right at this hour! How would you take it? Is your house set in order, or, what is more important still, is your soul ready? You are not told, as Ezechias was, the very hour when to expect death, yet, perceive the kindness of the Lord, His call to prepare for that hour is sent to everyone of us, and in good time too. No day goes by without reminding us that we are frail and mortal, that death is certain, but the hour uncertain. We are warned to prepare for that hour. Can we afford to tarry until we are thrown upon our sick-bed, and the messengers of death are hovering about? How do we know that our illness will last long enough that we may have the time to obtain the grace to prepare for a good death? May we not be stricken by sudden death, to die in sin, and go to eternal perdition? "Man knoweth not his own end," says Holy Writ, "but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in the evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them" (Eccl. IX, 12). Thus, if we have at heart the eternal salvation of our immortal soul, if we desire a blessed death, we must not delay our preparation from one day to the other, we must consider our whole life as a preparation for eternity, and make use of it accordingly.

How can this be done? In the first place, by frequently thinking of death. Not only will this thought prevent us from unduly attaching our heart to the things of this world, from pursuing sensual pleasures, and from giving offence to God, but it will urge us to penance, if we have been unfortu-

nate enough to offend the Lord. To prepare for a good death, we must lead a Christian life, a life according to the precepts of the divine commandments; we must try to keep our conscience clear, and make use of the proper means to attain this — for instance, meditation on the eternal truths, attending Holy Mass frequently, daily examination of conscience, receiving often the holy Sacraments of Penance and of the Altar, fervent prayer, works of Christian charity, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and so on. "To do all this," says St. Alphonsus of Liguori, "will be the sign of being chosen." Can there be greater peace for the soul than when, upon retiring at night, it is able to say: If death should come this night, I may hope to die in the grace of God.

Who among us would not wish for this good fortune? Let us, therefore, begin at once with this daily preparation for death. Then death may come to-day or to-morrow; we shall not need to dread his coming, but rather welcome it as the call to our native land in heaven. "But the just shall live evermore; and their reward is with the Lord and the care of them with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 16, 17). Our departed sister has prepared for a good death by a Christian life, and by receiving the holy rites of the Church, and so we hope that the precious faith be given to her "and a most acceptable lot in the temple of God. For the fruit of good labours is glorious" (Wisd. III, 14, 15). Let us pray.

XXXV

THE GRAVE

And they buried him in his sepulchre (4. Kings IX, 28).

Dear brethren, of Ozochias, the King of Juda, the Bible says: "And they buried him in his sepulchre." We have just now buried our departed brother, and since the grave is man's last place on earth, it will be said of everyone of us in time: "they buried him in his sepulchre." When death has come, the deceased is laid in his coffin, the family and friends sadly look on him a last time, and then the coffin is closed, and the body is carried out of the house he lived in to the graveyard, to be surrendered to the dust from which it came. Thus Job's words are fulfilled: "The grave is mine house, I have made my bed in darkness. I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother and my sister." Like our departed brother, so we too, shall finally rest in the grave, sooner or later, and our lot will be oblivion and corruption.

1. Have you ever considered how arduously people will work, what risks they will take, to become rich in money and possessions. They are forever scheming and planning, working and hustling, often even lying and cheating, to gather together as much as they can. And yet what will be left to a man ultimately, of all that he has amassed? Nothing but the four boards of a coffin and the shroud. "For we brought nothing into this world," says the Apostle, "and certainly we can carry nothing out" (1. Tim. VI, 7). Wealthy and poor are equals in the grave, both will be quickly forgotten. Even those who enjoyed the highest honours, after death they are spoken of a short while, but soon all talk about them ceases,

soon no one knows even their grave. This will also be our fate; "thou shalt be forgotten," says the prophet (Ex. XXI, 32). In this life you are anxious to be honoured and respected by men, "yet thou shalt be forgotten." Your body, which you value so much, which you are feeding and dressing with great care, for which you lavishly provide joys and amusements — this body will soon rot in the grave. "One man dieth strong and hale, and rich and hearty," says Job, "another in bitterness of soul without any riches, and yet they shall sleep together in the dust and worms shall cover them" (Job XXI, 23, 25, 26).

When St. Gregory was Pope, there died a young girl of great beauty, and her lover, a young nobleman, nearly became insane for grief. Since he would not be consoled, and it was feared that he would commit suicide, St. Gregory had the corpse exhumed, and when the young nobleman, shocked at the sight of its decomposition, turned to hasten away, the Pope took his hand and said: "Do not flee, my son, rather behold the picture of death. See the hideous head, the eyes extinguished, the skin black, the horrors of ravage and of worms. Behold the object of thy passion, behold her, for whose sake thou hast been willing to give up soul, eternal life, and God, behold and see." Such, indeed, is the end of earthly glory. Ultimately man will lie in the ground, despoiled, forsaken, the prey of corruption, nothing remaining, finally, but a handful of dust and bones.

2. But, my brethren, shall the human body, this masterpiece of creation, the very body that in Holy Communion has been blessed by the presence of God, shall it remain for ever in the darkness of the grave, for ever in the fetters of corruption? No; it shall not, a ray of light relieves the darkness of the grave. We are assured by faith that the dead shall return to life, and they shall one day emerge from

their graves. "Amen, I say unto you," says the Saviour, "that the hour cometh and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live" (John V, 25). At the general resurrection all shall rise from their graves and be transfigured. "It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption," says the Apostle; "it is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body" (1. Cor. XV, 42, 44). "Our Lord Jesus Christ will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory according to the operation whereby also he is able to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. III, 21). Then "joy everlasting shall be upon their heads [of the resurrected]; they shall obtain joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isa. LI, 11).

And when shall be fulfilled this hope for a glorious resurrection, for a magnificent transfiguration? Will it be fulfilled even if we pass our life on earth in the pursuit of temporal goods only, if we pass it in pride and vanity, in frivolous pleasures, in vices and sins? In this case we shall rise indeed, but not to glory and beatitude, but to disgrace and punishment. "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake," says the prophet, "some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always" (Dan. XII, 2). Hence let us remember and daily consider the words of the Saviour: "He who wants to enter the kingdom of God must keep the commandments." If in our life we live according to the holy Will of God, bearing our cross with patience, then, and only then, we may hope for a blessed death and for a glorious resurrection.

In regard to our departed brother we may hope that God has been merciful to him in view of his penance and of his patience in enduring the pains of his sickness. Let us pray for him in the spirit of charity.

XXXVI

THE GRAVE OF THE JUST

How terrible is this place: this is no other but the house of God and the gate of heaven (1. GEN. XXVIII, 17).

THERE is hardly another place to impress so forcibly the human mind and heart, to give occasion to such manifold sentiments and thoughts, as the place we are standing at now, where the bodies of departed Christians are sown in rows, a holy seed. The field of death is a holy ground, where our heart realizes with trembling, how perishable everything on earth is, and how solemn is eternity. The graveyard is the place of seriousness and silence, of sorrow and tears; it is a sacred place, devoted to loving memories and mourning, to pious remembrance, to solemn meditation, to quiet preparation for death; its soil is moistened with tears, and for the sowing of tears is promised the harvest of gladness. It is an assembly of tired pilgrims, who are peacefully resting from the sorrows of life, till the day dawns of resurrection. Past generations are resting here, present and coming generations will rest here. At this moment the soil has opened to receive in its furrow another seed. A resting place has been prepared for another pilgrim, who has come hither to rest after having served the Lord faithfully in the simplicity of his heart, and who closed his eyes in the love of God. At the grave of a just man of this kind we must speak as Jacob did: "How holy is this place, this is no other but the house of God and the gate of heaven."

1. The grave of the just is a holy place. His earthly re-

mains rest here, and, though they return unto dust, we must respect them because they were the habitation of an immortal soul, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and it shall rise one day in glory, to be transfigured, and to participate in the kingdom of God. For this reason this place receives the blessing of our holy religion; for this reason we adorn the graves of our beloved ones, and this is why we return here so often, though it makes us sad and moves us to tears. The grave of the just is not only a sacred place, it is —

2. A house of God. Our heart tells us here that God is nigh: we are refreshed by His comfort, we believe in the truth of His word. His Spirit testifies unto our spirit that we are immortal, that we shall meet again above. We feel aroused to holy resolutions, to pious contemplations, to devout prayer, for ourselves and for those we love, and for the peace of the deceased. Raised high above the pettiness and vanity of the world, high above earthly worries and cares, our soul anticipates the blessedness of a higher and better world. And, behold, the grave of the just is also —

3. A gate of heaven. "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it bringeth forth no fruit" (John XII, 24). We must die to bring forth fruit. In order to enter the kingdom of glory we must first pass through the dark valley of death, through the narrow gate of the grave. The just man sees in the grave the gate of heaven, the entrance into peace, the transition to eternity. As Jacob while lying asleep had a vision of angels ascending and descending, so does the spirit of the just dwell in the vision of the angels and of the Lord, while the body sleeps in the grave. "For the precious gift of faith shall be given him and a most acceptable lot in the temple of God, for the fruit of good labours is glorious" (Wisd. III, 14, 15).

Contemplate the grave in this light, my friends, and you

will be comforted and encouraged. Let us take care that we keep on the path of justice and virtue, and to lay up treasures for heaven by doing good works, so that it may be said also of our graves: "How holy is this place! This is no other but a house of God and the gate of heaven." Let us pray.

XXXVII

THE REST IN THE WORLD BEYOND

Let him rest in his bed that hath walked in his uprightness (Isa. LVII, 2).

Many men on earth are longing for rest, without ever finding it. They pass their days of life in hardships that only cease with death; they have to bear the toil and heat of the day, become worn out in their business, are oppressed by one adversity or another, and are worrying for ever, now because of disease and pain, then because of undeserved accusation, and often on account of injury and loss in their material possessions, and for various other reasons. True, man always hopes for better things; he may see one trouble after another overcome, but new troubles arise, robbing him again of the expected rest. A sad life, indeed! Shall this condition continue for ever? Is the large majority of men to have nothing for ever but unrest? This cannot be, the kind Father in heaven cannot have this ordained. He has appointed a time and place for those who labour and are burdened, where they may blissfully rest from their toil.

"There remaineth therefore a day of rest for the people of God," says St. Paul (Heb. IV, 9); but that day is not in this life, it comes only after death. "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13). Our departed sister, too, longed for rest all her life, in her many cares, afflictions, and sorrows. Now her wish is fulfilled, a blessed death has conducted her

to the place where rest and peace are dwelling. How may this rest be attained by all of us? What is this rest?

1. There cannot be the least doubt that God has intended this rest and peace for all men, and it is His wish that all should attain it. "For God so loved the world," said the Saviour, "as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John III, 16). "Christ has prepared a place for all in his Father's house" (John XIV), and He invites all: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you . . . and you shall find rest to your souls" (Matt. XI, 28, 29). If we do not attain this promised rest and blessedness, the fault lies with us, and not with God. There are two conditions we must fulfil: we must believe in God, and in everything He has revealed and bids us to believe through His holy Church, and we must be obedient to His law. It is written: "He shall rest in his bed, that hath walked in his uprightness"; meaning, he who walks the straight path, diverging neither to the right nor left, who loyally obeys the divine precepts and commandments — he shall enter the eternal dwelling, finding there rest and blessedness. That his hope for rest and blessedness might not be blasted, "St. Paul served the Father and his God, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and endeavouring to have always a conscience without offence towards God and towards men" (Acts XXIV, 14, 16). If the Lord's word is "a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths" (Ps. CXVII, 105), and if we adhere to it in belief and obedience, then we are faithful servants of the Lord, then He is well pleased in us, and our reward, according to His promise, will be eternal rest and everlasting blessedness. "He that walketh in his uprightness shall rest."

2. But what kind of rest is this that we may hope for? A

rest from the labour and toil of the earth, rest from all the sufferings and hardships of life, rest from all worries of the soul, in brief, perfect blessedness. In our earthly life earthly things are indispensable, and they entail industry and hard toil. There can be no true rest in this life. In death, however, we cast off everything earthly; the future body shall be a spiritual one (1. Cor. XV, 44). Consequently, if everything earthly ceases with death, there will cease also all cares about the earthly. We shall rest, since the work has been done.

In addition to toil and labour there are many other hardships our body is subject to, because it is an earthly body, a frail frame, and perishable. Hence, there are bodily ills and sickness, that make life harder still, and more burdensome even than labour and toil. From labour you would rest at evening, but that rest is often denied on account of other cares. Perfect rest comes only in the hereafter. In death we discard all that has been earthly, all earthly affliction is at an end. That which has caused pain is buried with the body, "the souls of the just are in the hand of God and the torment of death shall not touch them" (Wis. III, 1). The righteous may say, with St. Paul: "The Lord hath delivered me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2. Tim. IV, 18).

There is still another great misery on earth to disturb our rest, and that is the worry of the soul, caused often by conditions, and often, also, by sin. Everything earthly is unstable. We are uncertain of our money and estate, of our health, of life itself; we worry about food, clothing, and shelter, hence our anxious dread of the future, of the fate and success of our endeavour. We are in fear and worry because of our faults, shortcomings, and sins, that burden our conscience and give us unrest. Our soul is sighing to the Lord: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight no man

living shall be justified" (Ps. CXLII, 2). All this worry will cease when we attain eternal rest. Yonder, our possessions will not perish, they are eternal and without end; sin shall no longer have dominion over us (Rom. VI, 14), we shall be holy and guiltless in the sight of God. There we need no longer pray: Lord, have mercy on us! No, we shall praise the Lord incessantly, and rejoice that He has granted us His peace and rest.

Our departed sister has gone to this rest. In life she has borne the burden and heat of the day, but her conduct and Christian life was such that we may hope that she has entered the longed-for rest.

That we also may enter this blissful rest, let us keep in mind that only those who have walked in uprightness shall find it. Let us, therefore, walk the straight path of the Lord's commandments, let us patiently bear the hardships of this life, and never forget that there will be in store for us eternal rest and blessedness if we persevere in righteousness up to the last. Let us now pray for our sister in the spirit of charity, that the Lord in His mercy may grant her everlasting rest.

XXXVIII

THE THREE DWELLINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN

For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come (Heb. XIII, 14).

My dear brethren, when upon his father's death Abraham was about to enter his rich inheritance, the Lord commanded him: "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall shew thee" (1. Gen. XII, 1). Abraham obediently set out as the Lord commanded, and proceeded to a land which he had never seen, giving up a certain possession for an uncertain one, because God willed it so. Since God was his guide, Abraham reached the promised land, and became there blessed with more possessions than he could have hoped for in his former land, and was further rewarded for his faith and obedience by the glorious promise that in his progeny all nations of the earth would be blessed.

Truly a beautiful model for all faithful. "We have not here a lasting city," says the Apostle, "but we seek one that is to come." All the faithful are on their pilgrimage to the promised land, relying on God's word, not looking to the visible, but to the invisible; they are brought by God to the destination of their pilgrimage, guided in the right course, protected against all danger, and are finally rewarded for their faith by entering into the joy of the Lord. The road to eternal joy, however, leads through the grave. The grain of wheat must die ere it can bring fruit, and thus must we first occupy

the dwelling of death ere we can proceed from our earthly habitation to our home in heaven.

This quiet dwelling of death we see here prepared for a pilgrim who has just left this life, and, standing at this grave, let us give thought to the dwellings of man — the dwelling of our life on earth, the dwelling of the body in death, and, finally, the dwelling in the eternal city of God, our final goal.

1. The dwelling of our life in the body is the earth.

"We are sojourners before thee and strangers, as were all our fathers. Our days upon earth are as a shadow and there is no stay," said King David (1. Paral. XXIX, 15). This truth, my dear brethren, is obvious every day. We come into the world, stay in it a little while and depart again. Our life is nothing but a journey, a pilgrimage; every hour means a step towards the grave; we draw nearer and nearer until one day it opens to receive us.

But while the body dies, the soul survives, because it is immortal and destined for eternal life and bliss. You know by experience that there is no true and lasting bliss found in this world. We long for it; we scheme and plan, strive and work for happiness on earth, because the desire for it is born into us: yet we fail to find happiness here. The Lord, who planted this desire for happiness in our heart, will also gratify it; not here on earth, where we have no permanent place, but in the hereafter. He has given us this life that we may use it to earn eternal happiness. Thus the dwelling of our pilgrimage on earth is a workshop, where we are to work and toil for heaven and for eternal blessedness. In this life we must attain the knowledge of God and of the truths revealed by Him, we must make use of the means which God has deposited in His Holy Church, for the Saviour says: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John XXII, 3).

Here we are to love God and to serve Him, which means, to do His holy Will; for the Saviour teaches: "Not everyone who saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father, who is in heaven: he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. VII, 21). While in this life, we must aim at becoming rich in virtue and in good deeds, because we shall be judged according to them. While here in the house of our pilgrimage on earth, we must prepare for heaven and complete this preparation ere death comes to lead us into —

2. The dwelling of death, the grave. Whether our pilgrimage is of long or short duration, the grave is the ultimate place for the body. Whether endowed in our life with all that may bring earthly happiness, that may gratify the heart's desire, or whether we are made to drain the cup of bitterness as Job did, — all these things will come to an end in the grave. There the workingman will rest from his toil, the ambitious man from his endeavours, the covetous from his greed, the frivolous from his excesses, but there also will the good and pious Christian rest from his struggles, from suffering and labouring for the sake of the Lord. There they all rest "until the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise" (1. Cor. XV, 52). Then the soul will again assume its body and man will go into the last dwelling.

3. "The house of his eternity" (Eccl. XII, 5). This will be either the house of a blessed eternity, prepared by the Saviour for those that love Him, or the house of a wretched eternity, destined for those that refuse to believe, for those that die in sin. God has left it to us which house to choose. "Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death" (Jer. XXI, 8). Which one do we choose? No doubt we all wish to choose a blessed eternity. Let us then strive to become worthy of being received into

this house, by avoiding sin, by constant prayer, by frequently receiving the Holy Sacraments, by bearing our afflictions in patience, by good works and by preparing for a holy death. Our departed brother was duly prepared for a good death; hence we may hope that he has been received into the house of a blessed eternity: but let us pray for him.

XXXIX

THE FAITH IN CHRIST OUR CONSOLATION

In my Father's house there are many mansions (John XIV, 2).

When death has bereaved a family, the survivors are seeking consolation; they look in many places for it, but often not in the right one. You, too, my friends, are in need of consolation in the sorrow which this death has brought upon you. Where do you find it? Where else than in Him who says: "In my Father's house there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you: because I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be. And whither I go you know, and the way you know. Thomas said to Him: Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Whereupon Jesus said to him: I am the way and the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me" (John XIV, 2–6). These are the words of consolation which the Lord spoke to His disciples, when He did not want their hearts to be troubled because of His departure. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," said He to Thomas. Indeed, where He abides, there is life but not death; where He abides, there is not destruction, but resurrection. It is deeply to be regretted that so few are seeking in the Saviour a refuge in their affliction, since only the Saviour can give comfort and peace, life and beatitude. The sweetest consolation is offered by the faith in Jesus

Christ, the Son of God. He who believes in Him will experience this comfort.

1. Faith in his revelation: "In my Father's house are many mansions." This gives us the assurance that those who die in the love of God are not lost. Man's last hour is veiled in mystery; hence the parting is all the harder for the survivors. Are the departed lost to us? Whither has his soul gone? What is the state of our departed ones? These questions are foremost in the mind when someone we love has died, and then we look up to heaven praying for consolation and reassurance, and we find it there, too, if we only believe. "In my Father's house," Christ says, "there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you: because I go to prepare a place for you." Truly, a sublime consolation! Our departed beloved are not lost to us: what we here return to the earth is but the frame, not the spirit.

2. Faith in His promise: "I will take you to myself: that where I am you also may be." Death is not bitter for him who dies the death of the just, nor for his kin and friends, for the "just hath hope in his death" (Prov. XIV, 32). The sorrow of parting from our dying beloved is a great trial for the human heart. True, we know, the spirit endureth, and destruction shall not be its lot; but are we to meet again? The bond of blissful love that joined us on earth, will it be renewed in the hereafter? And the Lord makes answer, and faith affirms it: "I will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be." Death does not sever the bonds of true love; what God has joined together in this world is not for ever put asunder by the grave. The reunion with the dear departed is part of the bliss in store for us in heaven. This thought should soothe the sorrow of parting, as it should comfort the dying.

3. Faith in His person. The thought that "He is the way,

the truth, and the life" should fill us with confidence. Yet the hour of death is solemn, also, because we know it will take us to judgment, we are conscious also that we are sinners. How shall we prevail before the just Judge? How can we hope to be among the blessed? We shall live and meet again, this is certain, but *how* shall we meet? This solemn question grievously oppresses our heart, and again the Lord relieves us, for by the faith in His person, in His meritorious death, we may hope for the remission of our sins, for His grace, for eternal life. Since He, God's only begotten Son, has atoned for our sins by His Incarnation, by His sufferings and Crucifixion, He has assured us of life and immortality. If we make good use of the Sacraments, instituted in His holy Church for the remission of sins, for attaining the grace and mercy of God, then we cannot doubt, and must not doubt, of obtaining pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. If, with His assistance, we walk the path of God's commandments, we may hope for the eternal life: for "the just shall live for evermore: and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High, therefore you shall receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 16, 17): "I am the way." Indeed, He is, for by Him we come to the Father, and where the Father is, there is blessedness. "I am the truth." Indeed, He has the infallible truth of God. "I am the Life." Indeed, He gives life to those who are His. Where He abides, there is heavenly bliss, and His faithful are to be where He is.

Oh, what consolation, to become reunited finally in undisturbed bliss with those we love, to share with them eternal beatitude! This, indeed, enhances the rapture of eternal glory. Our weeping and mourning are therefore not without consolation, for we believe in Jesus Christ, and our faith is the greatest comfort in any affliction. Hence, let us live con-

forming to the precepts of this faith, lest we forfeit the heavenly inheritance: for "not everyone who saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," so says the Saviour, "but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. VII, 21). Now let us pray.

XL

HOW CHRISTIANS CONFESS THEIR SAVIOUR IN DEATH

For if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God has raised him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart we believe unto justice: but with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation (Rom. X, 9, 10).

Everything we know of our Saviour, everything we have received from Him, everything we hope from Him, urges us to praise His holy Name in word and deed, even in our sufferings and in our death. Hence, our life should be a continuous testimony to Christ's honour. He who ignores this duty, or forgets it, has ceased to be a Christian, and is in peril to see fulfilled in him the Lord's threat: "But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven " (Matt. X, 33). Hence, we must regard as blessed those who love Christ beyond everything and who honour in Him their Redeemer; blessed those, who throughout life make the confession of Christ their most important vocation, their highest honour, their greatest joy: for, as the Apostle says: "If thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." Such a faithful confessor of Christ has been our departed brother, at whose grave we are now standing, and I wish you to join me in contemplating the proper way in which the true Christian should confess his Saviour in death.

1. In the first place, he shows that he puts all his hope in Jesus. It is truly a pity to see many Christians so careless

about their salvation. It is sad to observe how they live for this world only, how they are satisfied in the flesh without ever giving a thought to eternity, though death may call them at any moment. They dread nothing more than the thought of death. Having ignored Christ, refusing to heed His call for penance, they are barred from joining in the most precious hope of the Christian. How different with the faithful! Throughout their life they have confessed their Saviour by word and deed. Feeling their last hour coming, they know of nothing more urgent to do than to repent once more all sins committed in life, and to receive the holy Sacraments of the Church, that they may be forgiven and fortified and comforted in the last struggle. They are resigned to God's will, even in great suffering of the body: they depart in good cheer and hope from this life, and, falling asleep in the Lord, they see the heaven opened for them.

2. The true Christian confesses his Saviour in death, also, by thanking God for all graces and benefactions received. This, of course, is unknown at the death-bed of those who refuse to make their peace with God. These open their mouth only in complaint, and not a word is heard of the grace and mercy of God. Quite different with the faithful. Whilst they, too, are sighing under their cross, they remember the benefits received from the Lord, and they confess: "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of thy truth which thou hast fulfilled to thy servant" (Gen. XXXII, 10). They endeavour to bear their suffering patiently, looking up to the Redeemer, who has said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. XVI, 24); and mindful of the promise, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he has been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him" (James I, 12).

3. Finally, the true Christian confesses his Saviour on the death-bed by referring his family to the Lord, and exhorting them to fear God. What else is more needful, what else should a Christian have more at heart? Yet, only rarely is this done, nowadays. Worldly parents are anxious for their children to get along in this life, to acquire wealth and position. They set their house in order in respect to temporal affairs, which of itself is necessary and proper, but they fail to care also, as they should, for the soul. They do not exhort their children to pursue the kingdom of God and His justice. How can the departure of such men be comforting and edifying? How different with the faithful! Desirous of bequeathing to them the highest spiritual goods, they direct their beloved to walk the path of God, they exhort them to be virtuous and God-fearing, and their own Christian life, their fear of God, their prayer, their patient suffering, and good death, serve as a most powerful sermon and example. Their last request is: "And now, little children, abide in him" (John II, 28), and their last exhortation: "Keep on the path of the divine Commandments, so that we all may meet above in the glory of God." In this way they bequeath to their family the most precious treasure.

Our departed brother has died a good death; hence we may hope that he is blessed. Let us say the usual prayers.

XLI

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

For God created man incorruptible (Wisd. II, 23).

My dear friends, here we meet again to pay the last tribute to one of our brethren. We are surrounded by graves in every direction — graves with large monuments and with little ones, well-kept graves and neglected ones. Under our feet lies the dust of fellow-men: probably everyone of you has buried here some kin or friend — someone he loved, someone dear to his heart; here they all sleep the sleep of death. And in a not distant time people will see here our graves, a younger generation will walk over them. Is this the end of all human glory? Is this earthly life concluded for ever with death and decay? If such were the fact, then, indeed, life would be miserable and unbearable with its cares and sorrows, its hardships and afflictions, its disappointments and blasted hopes. But this is not so: death ends the life of the body, but not the life of the soul; for God has created man incorruptible, and his goal is life eternal. Hence, if cast down by the loss of a dear and beloved one, we ought to turn our eyes away from the grave, to the life beyond, where their immortal souls live for ever, and where, so we hope, they have reached their ultimate goal of everlasting glory. Let us, for our comfort and consolation, briefly contemplate the truth of the immortality of the soul.

According to divine revelation, God created man immortal both in body and in soul. It remained for sin to subject the body to death and to cause "the dust return into its earth,

from whence it came." But the spirit returns to God, who gave it (Eccl. XII, 7). Holy Writ says of the just: "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, but they are in peace. Their hope is full of immortality" (Wisd. III, 2–4). And the God of Abraham and of Isaac is, as the Saviour declared, "not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. XXII, 32). This He said to refute the assertion of the Sadducees, who denied the future life. On another occasion He declared, leaving no room for doubt: "These [the evil doers] shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just into life everlasting" (Matt. XXV, 46).

Indeed, my brethren, if our soul were not immortal, then the Revelation of God would be to no purpose; for undeniably the main object of Christianity is to make the human soul virtuous, to enhance its love and fear of God, to encourage it to prize duty and virtue above everything, to shirk no sacrifice in this endeavour; but all this necessarily presupposes the belief in a future life of the soul. St. Paul based upon this belief his hope "that there shall be a resurrection of the just and unjust," and herein he endeavoured, "to have always a conscience without offence towards God and towards men" (Acts XXIV, 15, 16). He testified to this conviction by devoting the entire fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians to the resurrection of the dead, saying, among other things: "The corruptible [the body] must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality." And St. John the evangelist expresses the same conviction in the words: "And the world passes away and the lust thereof, but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever" (1. John II, 17).

Every man's own reason must tell him that his soul is immortal, that he need not fear that God will destroy it. We know that there abides in every human heart an over-

whelming desire for happiness, a desire which no earthly possession, no temporal joy can gratify. Can we assume that God, so wise and kind and holy, put in our hearts this desire for blessedness to no other purpose than to fill us with false hopes, to keep us in an unsatisfied condition, while the animal in its world of senses finds everything it desires? Indeed, this we can never assume; hence, our reason tells us that there must be a life hereafter, a condition of everlasting and undisturbed bliss. We are told by our own reason, furthermore, that God must reward virtue and punish vice. In this life, we often see that virtue must toil for its daily bread, while vice is living on the fat of the land; virtue is often despised, and vice esteemed, virtue often oppressed, while vice holds forth in pride. This observation might disconcert our belief in God's justice, if our reason did not tell us that there must be a hereafter, where the Lord will judge everyone according to his deeds, where virtue will be rewarded and vice punished, where God's justice will be made apparent beyond all doubt. Hence, death cannot mean the end of everything: the soul must be immortal; for "the hour cometh," says the Lord, "wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they that have done good things unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John V, 28).

My friends, we are given the choice between everlasting bliss and everlasting wretchedness, between the resurrection of life and the resurrection of ruin. Which shall we choose? No doubt we shall all choose the best. Very well, then, let us follow St. Paul in endeavouring to have at all times a conscience without offence towards God and towards men; let us walk every day of our life in the fear of the Lord, and should sin tempt us, let us be mindful of the advice of Holy Writ, to think in all our actions of the last things; then

we shall never sin. We may hope, then, that the words of Holy Writ will be fulfilled in us: "With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end and in the day of his death he shall be blessed" (Ecclus. I, 13). Our departed brother was prepared for a good death; hence, we hope that this promise has been fulfilled in him, but let us pray.

XLII

MEETING IN THE LIFE BEYOND

And we will have you not ignorant, Brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope (Thess. IV, 12).

My dear friends, no tears are more proper than those we shed at the graves of those we have loved in life with a tender and affectionate love, whose company has given us joy and comfort. What, indeed, could dry those tears but the hope to meet our beloved ones again? When inexorable death cuts the bonds which seemed tied so fast, so indissoluble; when death parts parents and children, brothers and sisters, husband and wife, the dearest friends, and with a sudden blow strikes down their happiness, what is it that upholds the bereaved and keeps them from despairing? Only the hope of meeting again, of becoming reunited with those whose death we mourn. This is the reason why the Apostle wrote the consoling words: "We will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope." May this hope prove a soothing balm also for you, my friends. The desire to meet again those we love, those dear to us, is innate in the human heart. And will not the Lord gratify this desire which He Himself has planted in the heart? He can do it, for He is Almighty; He will do it, because He is love. One of the joys in eternity will be the happy meeting with our kin and friends, with those who were our joy and comfort in the life on earth. Our beloved are not lost to us for ever, not parted from us for ever. St. Cyprian warns us: "Curb your grief, lest infidels may think

you, too, are not believing in a resurrection and a hereafter, and in a meeting in the future life."

The gospel warrants this hope of a meeting in heaven. The gospel preaches to us a Redeemer, who has overcome death and corruption, and vouches for the fact that the body shall rise from the grave to a new and glorious life. Our bodies will meet transfigured in the glory of God, recognize one another, and love one another even more tenderly than before. There "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes," and death shall be no longer feared, "for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. XXI, 4). St. Cyprian gives expression to this hope in the beautiful words: "Why not speed to see our native country, to greet our parents? Our beloved ones, who are sure of their salvation but concerned about ours, are waiting for us over there in great number — our parents, brothers, sons. What a joy for them and for us, to meet again and to again embrace one another!"

Let this hope, my friends, be our consolation at this grave, and in the bitter sorrow that may be caused us by the present, past, or future loss of a beloved member of the family or of a dear friend. The nearer the departed have been to our heart, the more we desire to see them again. This longing, planted in our heart by the God of Love Himself, will not remain ungratified. Beyond, in the mansions of the Father, are the just whose loss we mourn. Christ has prepared a place for them. There you will meet your dear parents, whose names you speak with reverence, gratitude, and love. There you will meet your beloved husband, to whom you were lovingly joined in this world. "And your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you" (John XVI, 22).

In order, however, not to be disappointed in our hope, we must become united in Christ the Lord, for all that I

have said can apply only to those who are one in Christ. For those who live, without Christ, in the world of the flesh and of sin, for those who die without faith and without repentance, the gospel has no comfort. There are living together here on earth faithful and scoffers, righteous and sinners, but there is no true union between them, they are separated from one another by a wide gulf, and where there is such a separation already in this life, there cannot be any union in the hereafter. The Lord will rally around Him only those who are His. In the kingdom of His glory there is no place for the unclean, the unholy, and the sinful. "The works of the flesh are manifest," says the Apostle, "which are uncleanness, adultery, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like, of the which I foretell you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God" (Gal. V, 19, 21).

If we desire, my brethren, to meet again with our beloved who departed in the love of God, let us seek sanctification, let us lay in store treasures of virtues and good deeds, so that, whether the hour of parting come late or early, we may console one another with the hope that "We shall meet again in the kingdom of everlasting love." Let us pray for the departed.

XLIII

WORK GOOD WHILE THERE IS TIME

And in doing good, let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good (Gal. VI, 9, 10).

My brethren, while considering what I might say for your consolation and edification at the grave of this young man, who after a brief illness died in the prime of life, I happened to think of an event of which I read recently in the life of a saintly bishop. One morning he rose early, to write a sermon on the text: "In doing good let us not fail." While at this task, he had a vision. He saw another bishop brought before a court, to give an account of his stewardship. The account was evidently not satisfactory, for the bishop was stripped of his vestments and handed over to the jailers. Then the judges arose, saying: "Whilst we have time, let us work good." The bishop who had the vision was saddened, especially when a messenger came that very day with the news that a friend of his, a bishop, had suddenly died. This bishop remembered for the rest of his life the words of the judges: "Whilst we have time, let us work good."

It behoves us also, dear brethren, to bear these words in mind and to act upon them —

1. Because the hour of our death is uncertain. May not the next striking of the clock mark our death? Are we not subject to death any moment? "Man knoweth not his own end," says Holy Writ (Eccl. IX, 12). In the council of the Almighty the year, the month, the day and hour, is fixed, when each of us must depart, but we do not know this time.

"At what hour you know not, the Son of Man will come," said the Saviour (Matt. XXIV, 44). Why does God keep secret the hour of our death? St. Gregory answers: "God keeps us ignorant of the hour of death for our own salvation, that we may be ever ready," that we may work good whilst we have the time. This we must resolve to do —

2. Without delay, because time is fleeting and once passed is gone for ever. Like a ship ploughing the sea and making port, time is speeding on, carrying man nearer and nearer to the end of his pilgrimage, death. Days go by and years, and he may reach the port of eternity without suspecting it to be near. Indeed, time is short and fleet, and few are mindful of it; time is precious, and few appreciate its value. "Time has infinite value," says St. Bernard; "in a certain sense time may be said to be of equal value with God, inasmuch as time well used is the price for the possession of God." In this fleeting time we can, and ought to, earn by good deeds heaven, and the sight and possession of God; failing this, we can never make up for it in the hereafter; for then "the night has come when no man can work" (John IX, 4). For this reason Holy Writ enjoins us: "Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge shall be in the grave, whither thou art hastening" (Eccl. IX, 10).

Hence, if desirous of doing good, we must do it in this life and take advantage of time and opportunity —

3. Because death is immediately followed by the judgment, when "God will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. II, 6). At the gate of eternity we must leave behind money and possessions, positions and titles, joys and pleasures, kin and friends, everything we have loved and treasured on earth, and nothing but our deeds will accompany us into eternity — our good deeds to merit us everlasting re-

ward, our evil deeds to deliver us to the everlasting torments of hell.

My dear brethren, if death were to take us unawares this moment, or to-day or to-morrow, would we appear before the judgment of God well fortified with good works and meritorious deeds, or would we go there empty-handed, perhaps burdened with fault? Ask yourselves this question not only to-day, but often, and remember the warning of the Apostle: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. X, 31). If your conscience tells you that you have done sinful works rather than good deeds, oh, turn to the Lord without delay, and practise works of penance! Uncertain is the hour of death, time is fleeting, and the judgment of the Lord is nigh. I conclude with the words of St. Paul: "And in doing good, let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing. Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good." Let us now pray for the deceased.

XLIV

THE WARNING VOICE OF THE GRAVE

And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever (John II, 17).

We are assembled here to bury the earthly remains of a brother called away by death after he had by the grace of God devoutly prepared for his death. The life of the world is for most men a busy and restless struggle for wealth and pleasure. The struggle never ceases until death puts a stop to all this agitation, after that reigns the silence of the grave. What is the result of all this exertion? What has been saved out of it, what is really of avail? The grave calls to us the solemn warning expressed by St. John in the words: "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever."

1. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof." Whatever is visible is perishable, says one of the Apostles, and our experience testifies to the truth of his words. All that is of the earth lasts only a while, it can satisfy the human heart only for a little while. The possessions of this earth are beset with cares, they jeopardize the soul, and they are so unstable that we hardly know from one hour to the next whether we may enjoy them. Even if we keep them to the end, we shall have to leave them to someone else, and often the heir will quickly dissipate the wealth gathered by years of hardships, maybe of sins; the inheritance indeed often proves a curse rather than a blessing. The joys of this earth are for a time only, they are often paid for with remorse, often they produce

disgust rather than satisfaction. The lust of the world leaves the heart empty, it kills all higher impulses in man. Physically exhausted, incapable of higher ideals, enslaved by sensuality, life at last becomes an unbearable burden. Alas! the poorest of the poor is he who seeks his joy in the world and in sin; he may find questionable pleasure for a short while, but never rest; poorer than the poorest he, who, having been cheated by the world, is finally told by it, as Judas was told by the high priests: "What is that to us? look thou to it."

The grave loudly calls out to you: "The world passeth away and the lust thereof." Hence, do not seek your happiness in what is perishable, do not set your heart upon earthly things, seek the higher joys of heaven, that you may not perish with the world, that the day of your physical death may not also be the day of your *everlasting* death. A second warning of the grave is, that only —

2. "He that doth the will of God, abideth for ever." The Apostle tells us also that the invisible is everlasting, and this message should fill us with joy. This earth may take from us what belongs to it, everything temporal may come to an end; it matters not as long as we are the children of the Spirit, of divine origin, and the heirs of immortality. Though walking on the earth, entrusted by God with the goods of the earth, there are higher ideals, to aim at which is the one thing needful, and the temporal should serve us only as a means thereto. There are higher joys than the gratification of the senses — joys not based upon created things, but upon God; joys that cannot be dampened or disturbed by accident or adversity; joys the world knows not, which give us the foretaste of heavenly bliss. To these joys belong the living communion with God, the consciousness of His grace, the possession of His peace obtained by following His commandments, obtained by a heart humbly devoted to Him in joy and sorrow, by the

feeling that He is nigh, by working for His kingdom and for the welfare of the neighbour, by the consciousness of having faithfully done one's duty, of having been forgiven one's faults, and by the blissful hope of finally joining the Lord in His kingdom of glory. If we have attained these goods — and God is sure to grant them to those who earnestly seek and desire them — if we have tasted these joys in God, then we may imagine how rich and blessed we shall be in heaven. How can death, how can the grave, deprive us of these possessions? These are joys and possessions we may take along to the other world, where they will be increased to us a thousandfold.

Oh, let us all strive for these goods, the only ones worth striving for! "My meat," says the Saviour, "is to do the will of Him that sent me, that I may perfect his work" (John IV, 34). Hence, let us do God's holy Will, that we may perfect the needful work of sanctifying our soul. "The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever."

Our dear departed brother endeavoured to do the Will of God. If he has not been successful in doing it perfectly — and who of us is able to do it perfectly? — and should on that account be detained in purgatory, let us pray for him that he may be granted everlasting peace.

XLV

SUFFERING LEADS TO GOD

When tribulation and distress shall come upon you, then they shall call upon me (PROV. I, 27, 28).

IN deep sorrow we are standing here at the grave of a man, a devoted husband, who according to human reckoning had to part all too soon from his beloved wife; at the grave of a father whose children are still much in need of a provider and protector. In afflictions of this kind we look in vain to this world for comfort; it shows us nothing but the grave, and its sight can but deepen our anguish. Under such circumstances the heart must rise to God, who directs the course of our life.

Communication with God should be our joy under all circumstances: we should deem it our highest bliss, both in good fortune and in adversity, to be in fervent communion with God, to lay before Him all our requests, to look to Him for the needed help. What, indeed, can be more blissful to us than the love of God, who is love Himself? Prayer makes us wiser in good fortune, more hopeful in misfortune, stronger in danger. But no other thought will impart to us greater strength for doing good, hold us back from sin with a stronger hand, than the thought of the judgment.

A glance at men, at their aims and doings, shows us that in the days of good fortune they only too often forget to pray, and that the Prophet spoke true when he said: "When tribulation and distress shall come upon you, then shall they call upon me." It is then only when many realize that Almighty God alone can help, that His love alone remains true for ever, that the proper means to bring us consolation, peace, and help

are known to His wisdom alone. Like the son, who after his missteps returns to his father, because experience has taught him that nothing in the world can supplant the wisdom and love of the father, thus men will turn back from the vanity of the world, when experience has taught them that no one will love them as truly as God, that no one will, or can, comfort and bless them as the Eternal Love does. To win God's pleasure, to become worthy of His love, this is thereafter the goal they zealously pursue. Verily, tribulations will lead us back to our heavenly Father, because they convince us of the emptiness of everything earthly. How empty will many things then appear that we had thought to be grand and glorious! How we feel ashamed of the low pleasures that detracted our heart from God! For now, even though in struggle and suffering, we learn to know joys that are infinitely greater, joys pure and everlasting, the peace of God, to whom we now open our heart in childlike confidence, finding in Him the comfort needed in our sufferings.

Daily experience shows how true this is. Too often is prayer forgotten in the days of prosperity; man has then other things at heart. Often is prayer said without devotion, if at all. But the ways of sorrow teach man to pray; adversity will induce men to seek refuge in Him, who alone can help, whose grace and comfort are indispensable to us. The conscience, too, will raise its voice in the days of affliction, urging man to seek grace and mercy, which he can obtain only by humble supplication.

Sorrow and affliction teach us not only to pray, but also to pray properly. As long as we are in good health and wanting nothing, we do not feel the need of praying so strongly as we do in days of sickness, in distress and want; then we raise our hearts with fervour to Him from whom all help cometh.

The more harassed by cares and sorrows, the greater our

need of the Lord for our consolation. The more we suffer, the more fervently we beseech His fatherly heart.

Sufferings will teach us, furthermore, to pray in humility. As long as we are healthy and prosperous, we rely all too much upon ourselves. By distress, however, we are reminded of our weakness, in sickness and pain we realize that we are frail and mortal. Then our self-love is torn from its perilous delusions, our conscience reminds us of our errors and sins, reminds us that the judgment of God will render to every man according to his works. Then we have the wish to reform and to be pardoned, and we hasten to become reconciled with God by an humble confession of our sins. Then we pray humbly, with childlike resignation to the Will of God; we leave it to Him to give or to withhold according to His wisdom.

You, my dear friends, who have suffered such great loss should also seek refuge in Him, who not only inflicts wounds, but also heals them. We understand your grief, but we desire to offer consolation, and true consolation you can obtain only by turning to God, without whose Will this loss could not have fallen upon you. Call upon Him for help, and He will alleviate your distress so that you may be able to bear it. "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. XLIX, 15).

And since prayer brings us so great a blessing, and so much consolation in the days of sorrow, let us not forget God in our days of prosperity; indeed, we can never do without His grace, help, and blessing, either in prosperity or in adversity. Let us not depart from this grave without praying for the peace of the soul of the departed.

XLVI

COMFORT IN SUFFERING

For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us (Rom. VIII, 18).

"Man born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries," says pious Job (XIV, 1). Every day brings fresh troubles, and without number are in this life the worries and sorrows, afflictions and adversities, from which no one is spared. Everybody has his cross, be it small or large. And yet everything is sent by God for our spiritual welfare.

To the God-fearing all things serve for the best. Merciful God, in sending us tribulations and distress, does this only to test, or to reform us, and to provide an opportunity to prove ourselves worthy; He gives us His grace to bear patiently all trials, and to lay up treasures for the kingdom of heaven: thus, sowing in sorrow, there will be reaped a bountiful harvest of joys; "for I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us," says St. Paul.

The way of the Cross and of suffering has been completed by our friend, who, we hope, has now attained salvation and eternal life. We are consoling ourselves in our grief and bereavement with the truth expressed by the Apostle, that all the sufferings and pains that our departed brother had to bear in this life, and especially in his sickness, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that has been revealed in him, who died in the love of God. Let these words of the Apostle henceforth and for all days be our

comfort in suffering, for these words contain a threefold truth: (1) Suffering is the portion of all men; (2) suffering is brief, and, (3) sufferings are nothing in comparison with the glory to come.

1. The same law that made *death* the punishment for sin also brought *suffering* into the world, as it is but a consequence of sin. The Lord God said to Eve: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee." And He said to Adam: "Cursed is the earth in thy work, with labour and toil thou shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken" (Gen. III, 19). Ever since then "great labour is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their mother's womb until the day of their burial into the mother of all" (Ecclus. XL, 1). Every man carries a cross, and feels the burden of this cross, and everyone thinks his cross the bigger and imagines his neighbour's the smaller. Many regard with a covetous eye the rich and prominent, those that are high and honoured in this world, but this is the error and delusion of envy and of selfishness; for, aside from the fact that the great and rich of this world are subject to afflictions of body and soul like other mortals, and likewise to disease and death, they also have their particular troubles, as the poor have their particular troubles. No one on earth is without his cross, suffering is the lot of all men, and while the cross of some men is heavier than that of others, we must remember that there is not only a difference in crosses, but also in grace: in the trials He sends, God does not overtax the strength of anyone, He bestows upon the sufferer sufficient grace to bear His cross in the way God

desires him to bear it. Furthermore, it is just to His chosen and beloved children that God sends the sorest afflictions, the heaviest visitations. He dearly loved His Blessed Mother, and, behold, He made her the most sorrowful Mother. Therefore the devout Christian should say to himself: All people have their suffering: hence, also I must suffer. I desire to suffer, because I deserve it, I am an ungrateful creature of God, I have violated His commandments, it is but proper that I suffer.

2. We should also consider that the sufferings of this time are of short duration, like everything temporal. What is fleeter than time? "Thou sleepest," says St. Ambrose, "but time sleepeth not, it speeds by, and carries off in its flight the sufferings as well as the joys of this life. As the river flows into the sea, never to return, thus flow away our days of life. The hour of death finishes both, the days of our life and its sufferings." Therefore, in the afflictions of this life, let us take comfort in the thought: All suffering of this earth is soon at an end: all tribulations of this life are but tribulations of a short time, decreasing and ending in the course of time. When the patriarch Jacob was asked his age by Pharao, he replied: "The days of my pilgrimage are 130 years, few and evil." A life of 130 years seems a long life, yet it seems short after the years have passed, the dying looks back to his past life as to a short dream. Therefore, my Christian brother, even if thy poverty, thy want and distress, will endure for a time, finally it must come to an end. Should thy pain, thy suffering, be ever so violent and protracted, should thy worries be ever so hard and bitter, finally they will come to an end; for all tribulations of this life are for a time only.

3. And then follows the glory promised by God to those who are His. "I reckon," says the Apostle, "that the suffer-

ings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." Thus he encourages us to bear the sufferings of this short time with resignation to the holy Will of God, that we may obtain the promised glory. The sense of his words is: Christians, remain steadfast and be comforted, death will not only end all your suffering, but it will be the beginning of joy everlasting; take heart in your crosses, in your distress, in your tribulations, because better times are in store for you — everlasting, happy times. This body, now racked by pain and troubled by adversity, shall once rise gloriously in God's power and glory, it shall shine as the sun, and join for evermore your glorified soul: then there will be no longer death, God will dry your tears, and He will prepare for you a blessedness beyond human comprehension.

What soul, my brethren, be it ever so harassed and suffering, would not be fortified by the thought of the future glory? Many there are who have been sighing for years under the burden of a diseased body, dying a slow death; yet what are their sufferings against the glory to be revealed in those who unite their sufferings with Christ's sufferings, and bear them with patience and resignation? A few years of woe and pain are followed by joy and blessedness everlasting. Many and manifold are the sufferings on earth; but what sufferer is not comforted by the promise of God, that after this short tribulation he shall enjoy a blessedness and glory that no human eye has seen, no human ear has heard, no human reason can grasp!

This glory is enjoyed by many chosen souls; they are in the everlasting possession of God and of all His blessedness; they know now that the suffering of this time is not worthy to be compared to the glory that has been revealed in them. Hence, have we really cause to complain of our suffering? Must

we not look upon it as rather a grace of God? Should we not thank God for rewarding our brief adversities with eternal joy? Hence, instead of weeping over the loss of the dear departed, let us thank God that his sufferings are at an end, that they have been changed, as we may hope, into joy and glory everlasting; let us accept our loss with thankfulness and devotion, bear it patiently, and lead such a Christian life that we may once share in the kingdom promised. Let us pray for the deceased.

XLVII

THE NIGHT OF DEATH FOR BODY AND SOUL

I must work whilst it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work (John IX, 4).

Night is not a friend of man, says an old adage. Darkness inspires fear, thieves come at night, accidents and fires are more terrifying at night than in the daytime. At night death carries off most of its victims. Our sister, too, died at night, but death did not seem to her an enemy, but a friend, for whom she had long wished as the deliverer from her sufferings and the messenger of eternal peace. She had prepared for death by receiving the holy rites of the Church, and by enduring her long sufferings in patience for the sake of God; thus she could hope to proceed through the night of death to everlasting light. While the night of this earth is not the friend of man, there is yet another night, still more terrible, the night of death for the body and for the soul. I wish to speak to you a few words about this night for your warning and benefit.

1. However fiercely the sun may shine on a hot summer's day, at last it will set; there comes evening, which turns gradually into that state of darkness and stillness that we call night. This process in nature has its counterpart in the life of man. We may reach the age of seventy, eighty, or even ninety years; the day will come when the sun of life will set for us, there will come the evening of life, followed by the dark night of death. St. Cyprian says that everybody is born with a rope around his neck, and the sick-bed or other place where he dies is the gallows where he is executed, be-

cause (do not forget this) death is an expiation for sin. As after sunset, when night comes, our eyes close in sleep and are no longer seeing, so, when the night of death comes, the eyes of men are closed to this world for ever, until the day of judgment. The body is put in a coffin, interred, and covered with earth. All worldly pride and glory is at an end. For a short while his name will still be mentioned, but soon, all too soon, he will be forgotten. After a little while it will be as if he had never lived; even of men famous in life hardly anything more is known than the place where they lie buried. "Oh, vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccl. II). In his grave lies here the covetous man; in life he could never get enough, now he is satisfied with a small hole in the ground. There lies the unchaste, who, to gratify his flesh, disregarded God and eternity; now his flesh is the food of the worms. There lies the quarrelsome person, who could never get along with anybody in life; now he cares not who is his neighbour. There lies, also, the good and pious Christian, resting from the struggle and the temptations of this life, eternally rejoicing in God, His Saviour. For, my brethren, whatever man sows in this life, that shall he reap in the hereafter. St. Paul tells us that "he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption; but he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting" (Gal. VI, 8). We may understand, then, why St. Teresa exclaimed whenever the clock struck the hour: "Thank God, another hour nearer to my Lord and Saviour: another hour less of this life." Now we may understand, also, why so many people are afraid to die. The cause is the fear of the dark night of death. Death parts us from everything in this life, and decides our fate in the other world. And death comes for everyone of us — to-day it is this one, to-morrow it may be myself, everyone in his turn — and yet

how little attention do we pay to this truth! If we would think oftener of the night of death, we would more carefully avoid sin; sin alone it is that makes the thought of death dreadful, and eternity terrible. Take away sin, and death has lost its sting.

But, to arrive through the night of death at the glorious day of eternity, we must not only flee sin, but do good works; for Jesus says: the tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. He admonishes us to lay up treasures that no thief can steal, that no rust can consume, and worms cannot eat — treasures which remain ours even after death, and which will accompany us into the hereafter. What kind of treasures are these? They are our good deeds. Hence, the exhortation of the Apostle: "And in doing good, let us not fail. For in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Verily, if, out of love to God, we not only flee sin, but are zealous in doing good, if we keep the commandments, perform faithfully the duties of our station and vocation, and bear patiently for the love of God the sufferings and adversities of this life, then we are sowing a seed from which we shall reap a rich harvest in the hereafter. But if during our life we fail to lay up such treasures, then there will come for us not only the night of death of the *body*, but the still more horrible night of death for the *soul*.

2. The night of death of the soul is twofold. It may befall the soul already in this life, and, which is the greater calamity, in the hereafter. Night it is, already in this world, in the heart of the sinner. The light of divine grace is extinguished in his soul; he does not see the evil of the path he walks; he does not see the ruin to which the gay road of vice is leading; and if a man like this does not begin to pray and to take his refuge in God and the Blessed Virgin, if others in pity do not pray for him, if he is not converted,

then, alas, he is lost, he will walk on in the darkness of the soul till death comes forth for the body, and then this soul enters the night of eternal death, perdition for evermore. Our Lord, in speaking of hell, calls it the place of wretchedness, the place of everlasting darkness. Oh, terrible night, where the light of God does not shine for all eternity! Oh, horrible darkness, where never in all eternity a ray of heavenly glory will penetrate! Oh, terrible place, where those condemned by God must suffer eternally, without hope, without relief!

Alas, a terrible truth! And yet the truth! Hence, how precious and invaluable are the moments, the hours and days, of our life on earth! Our whole eternity depends on the good or bad use we make of them. Once dead, we can no longer do good: all our time of grace is then at an end. Eternity points out to man all the sins he has committed, but it gives him no longer the means to wipe them out. What in eternity even the Saints in heaven are powerless to achieve, namely, a higher degree of blessedness, we can achieve while we yet live in this world, by virtue or good deeds. What the damned in hell throughout eternity cannot do, despite all their despair, their suffering and wailing, namely, appease the wrath of the Lord, this we can do while yet in this life. Even if a man has burdened his soul with a thousand mortal sins, if he has merited hell a thousand times, yet he may save his soul from eternal perdition, may save it in a single moment, by a sincere return to God and true repentance.

My dear brethren, let us take to heart the admonition of the Lord: "Work whilst it is day, for night cometh, when no man can work." Let us take to heart the words of the Apostle: "Work your salvation with fear and trembling." Indeed, we must work our salvation with fear and trembling; and let him who stands, beware from falling, and let him who has fallen, arise from his fall whilst it is time. Only

the humble recognition of our frailty, only fervent prayer and faithful coöperation with the grace of God, can prevent us from falling, and if we should fall, can lift us from the fall and save us from eternal night, from everlasting darkness.

That our departed sister has been received into the dwelling of eternal light is our fervent hope, and we will now offer a prayer for the peace of her soul.

XLVIII

SAVE THY SOUL

Save thy soul (GEN. XIX, 17).

"MAN knoweth not his own end, but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, some are taken in the evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them" (Eccl. IX, 12). Our experience has often verified this truth, and again the sudden death of our brother, whose earthly remains we have just laid to rest, calls out to us, with loud and urgent voice: "Man knoweth not his end." There is but one step between life and death. What has happened to him may happen to anyone of us too; hence I recall for your special consideration the words which the angel spoke to Lot before the destruction of Sodom, "Save thy soul!"

These words mean, look out, be prepared for death, lest your soul go to perdition with the death of the body, see that you are saved for eternity. For the soul is more precious than the body, which is but dust and shall return unto dust; the soul is of greater value than all the wealth, honours, and pleasures of this world, all of which we must leave behind us in death. The soul is the breath of God, spirit of His Spirit, it bears the image of God. How dare we despoil this image and disfigure it by sin? What, then, does it matter if we lose all our belongings, even life? If only the soul is saved, then everything is saved; for we must prize our soul more highly than all the treasures and honours of this world, more highly than life itself, because the soul is the precious image of God.

To appreciate better the value of the soul look at the price paid for its redemption, remember who paid that price. St. Eusebius says: "If you do not listen to Him who has created you, then ask Him who has redeemed you, how much you are worth. What is the price which Christ has paid for thee? Consider the sufferings of Jesus Christ, how He was mistreated and mocked; think of the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the Cross. To redeem thee, to purchase thee, He sacrificed His life — He, God's eternal Son — He, true God like the Father. Look at the magnificence of the moon and stars, look at the earth in all its beauty; what is it all compared to God? Hardly more than a speck of dust. Therefore, thou art worth infinitely more than heaven and earth, with all their splendour. The standard of thy worth is the Eternal God Himself, for He has purchased thee with His own Blood." And St. Bernard says: "Thou art worth as much as the Blood of Our Lord Jesus."

Since this is so, my brethren, since our soul is the image of God, since Christ has purchased our soul with His precious Blood, must we not exert all our power to save it for heaven? Alas, how sadly we often neglect our soul, exposing it to the danger of everlasting perdition! We dress and adorn our body, but the soul is left bare of virtue. The body is carefully cleansed, but the soul is soiled by sin. If our body takes sick, then we summon at once the physician and take the remedies to recover; but in the disease of the soul we often ignore the remedy instituted for it by the Saviour, in the Sacrament of Penance. We do not think of reforming, we do not practise self-denial and works of penance, we do not avoid the occasions of sin.

Thus you see how little esteemed the soul is, in many cases, although it is the image of God, and has been redeemed with the precious Blood of our Lord. Oh, take to heart the words

of our Saviour: "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. XVI, 26). What does it profit to become rich in worldly possessions, but to remain poor in good deeds? What good will it do to occupy positions of honour, if in the eyes of God we are disgraced because of our sins? Of what profit are all the pleasures of this world, if at the judgment seat of God we shall be condemned to everlasting pain? Therefore, save your soul, first of all. Keep it undefiled by sin. The soul is God's image, purchased by the Blood of Christ. Avoid sin and its occasions, for he who courts danger shall succumb to danger. Be firm and steadfast in temptation, fight the good fight lest you forfeit the crown of life. And if you should have the misfortune to sin, then go forthwith and cleanse your soul in the Sacrament of Penance. But you must do more. Adorn your soul day by day with virtues and good works. Then you may hope, even in the event of a sudden death, to save your soul and to be received into eternal life. Let us now pray for our departed brother.

XLIX

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

But one thing is necessary (Luke X, 42).

My friends, there is one thing at once the highest good, the goal, and the object of our life. What is this one thing? It is eternal salvation. Hence, the Apostle exhorts us to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. II, 12); hence, the Lord Himself commanded us to seek, in the first place, and before everything else, God's kingdom and justice. This truth is forgotten by many people; their aim is directed at things altogether different, at idle and perishable goods, which in their mind are the one thing necessary. God, in His fatherly love, therefore frequently repeats His warning: "But one thing is necessary, thy eternal salvation." This warning He puts before us in many forms, but especially by the sight of death. This warning He is giving us to-day, by the grave of a man who had to part from his family in the prime of his life. And if anyone of us should think that his own death is surely a long time distant, and that this warning does not apply to him, that he will have plenty of time to care for the salvation of his soul, I would especially warn him that the grave is calling men in all stages of life.

1. It calls the age of youth. "But one thing is necessary," for uncertain is the hour of death. Rosy cheeks, vigour of life, youthful energy, give not immunity from death; often we see young men and young women carried to their graves. Hence, they too must work out their salvation; hence, the fear of God and piety must begin with early childhood. We have in Christ a sublime Model to imitate, and in the Old

Testament we find models in Joseph, Samuel, Jonathan, and in young Tobias. "I love them that love me," says the Lord, "and they that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me" (Prov. VIII, 17). "By what does a young man correct his way?" asks the Psalmist, and answers: "By observing thy words" (Ps. CXVIII, 9). "Rejoice, therefore, Oh young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thy eyes," says Holy Writ, adding, however, "and know that for all these God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccl. IX, 10). If young people devote their whole time and their entire mind to the gain of earthly knowledge, if they seek and enjoy only worldly pleasures, if they pursue only vain and idle things, of what profit will all this be when they suddenly fall a prey to death? Oh, young people, give room in your heart to the Holy Ghost! The Lord's words, "But one thing is necessary," apply to you as they did to the young woman they were spoken to. Choose the better part, like Mary, the sister of Lazarus, so that death cannot despoil you of your possessions.

2. The grave calls the age of manhood. At the mature age, when men and women have usually become fathers and mothers of families, then the duties of this life will often make great demands upon their energy; they must work and worry, and be at all times busy to provide for their family the necessaries of life; often they allow themselves to get so wrapped up in this work as to lose sight of the needs of the soul, of the care for its salvation. Should death come — and we often see strong men and women taken by death — what good do all those earthly possessions do that they have scraped together, of what benefit is all the earthly work they have done, neglecting the one, necessary thing? Surely no one is more in need of the fear of God and of serious care for His salvation than a father, because he should serve

in this matter as a model to his family. "Blessed are all they that fear the Lord, that walk in his ways; blessed art thou; and it shall be well with thee" (Ps. CXXVII, 1, 2).

3. Old age, especially, should heed the call of the grave. But one thing is necessary: fleeting is the time of life. Urgent is the call to those who, in human reckoning, are standing at the brink of the grave, those advanced in years, and they are particularly reminded, that the grave is nigh, by the frequent deaths of the friends and acquaintances of their younger days, by the waning of their physical vigour, by grey hair, and wrinkles. And yet, even at this stage of life we meet with much love of life and of worldly things, as if there would never be a parting from this world. It behooves those of advanced age, particularly, to think of their immortal souls, lest they appear unprepared before God, lest they miss the true aim of life, lest they live a long life in vain. Therefore, we read: "Three sorts my soul hateth and I am greatly grieved at their life: a poor man that is proud; a rich man that is a liar; and an old man that is a fool and doting. The things that thou hast not gathered in thy youth, how shalt thou find them in thy old age? Oh how comely is wisdom for the aged and understanding and counsel to men of honour" (Eccl. XXV, 3, 7).

Let us all take to heart the words of the Lord, whatever our stage of life: "But one thing is necessary." Let us strive to promote this one thing necessary, the salvation of our soul, as well as we can, by a God-fearing and virtuous life, that the Lord may find us watching and ready when He comes to summon us. None of us can know whether he will find the time and grace to prepare for death by the holy rites of the Church as did our departed brother. If you desire the salvation of your soul, do not delay your conversion to God. Now let us say a prayer for the deceased.

L

IF CHRIST IS OUR LIFE, THEN DEATH IS OUR GAIN

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (PHIL. I, 21).

MY friends, the errand on which we have come shows us the goal of our pilgrimage on earth, the grave. In this grave we have laid a pilgrim who commanded the sincere respect of us all by his industry and probity, by his generous disposition, his Christian mind and life, and who, we may therefore hope, has found grace before the Lord.

Standing at this grave, we are forcibly reminded of the truth that everything of this earth has an end, and that everything living on earth must die. But another thought suggests itself with equal force, the terrifying thought that death and the grave are followed by the judgment, and that death means for us an accounting for our stewardship. It is true, since our Lord Jesus has triumphed over death and over the grave, we describe the grave as a resting place, a haven of peace, the gate to the kingdom of glory. All this it is, indeed, praise be to the Lord! It is our great good fortune to say with the Apostle: "To die is gain." But bear in mind that he prefaced this with the words: "To me, to live is Christ." For only they will derive a benefit from the Lord's victory over death and the grave, and to die is a gain only for those, whose life was Christ, which means, those who belonged to the Lord as His faithful, as the living members of His Church. Let us briefly meditate here, on this sol-

emn but also consoling truth, that to die is our gain if Christ is our life.

1. To die is our gain only if Christ is our life. His glory will be revealed in us in death only if we have believed in the divinity of His Person and in His doctrine. Everything depends on our answer to the question: "What think you of Christ?" (Matt. XXII, 42). Peter gave the answer: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. XVI, 16). True, flesh and blood do not reveal this to us, but our Father who is in heaven. Blessed are they, who have this belief by the grace of God, for they have in Christ the teacher of the truth, the model and example for their life, the forgiver of sins, the mediator and advocate with the Father, the prince of peace, the friend of their souls, the gracious Judge, and, persevering in this belief, they need not be anxious in the hour of death, but may hope to enter the kingdom of glory. "He that believeth in the Son," says St. John, "hath life everlasting: but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John III, 36).

2. Only if Christ is our life, then death is our gain, for, when we die, He will give us the new life only if during our life we have made use of the merits of His redeeming Sacrifice. All men can be benefited by the merits of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, they are offered to all men by His established Church, but it is for men to secure them through the means of grace instituted in this Church. This is why Christ has given to His priests the power of forgiving sins, and why His priests are exhorting you incessantly: Be reconciled to God, for "Him, who knew no sin, for us he hath made sin that we might be made the justice of God in him" (2. Cor. V, 21). When we are in sin, my dear friends, then we are the enemies of God, children of God's wrath, doomed to perdition; but if we become reconciled to God in the Sacra-

ment of Penance, instituted by Christ in His Church for the remission of sins, then the Holy Ghost again bestows upon us sanctifying grace, justice, and sanctity, the supernatural life of the soul. St. Paul says, "The Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the children of God, but, if children, heirs also and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. VIII, 16, 17). There is also the Holy Eucharist, wherein Christ, the Son of God, gives Himself to the faithful, that they may have the true life within themselves. There is the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, that He has instituted for the faithful who are sick. Need anyone who regularly and devoutly receives the Sacraments be afraid of death? To die, will it not be his gain? It is: he has received Christ, the true Life, and may hope that in him the word will be fulfilled: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, although he shall be dead, shall live" (John XI, 25).

3. Only if we live in Christ, then to die will be our gain; for only those who in life have faithfully observed His commandments shall in death find in Him a merciful Judge. "If any man will come after me," demands the Lord, "let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." And the loyal faithful know they are in duty bound to follow Him; it is their task of life, it is the one thing necessary. But it is not easy. The way mapped out by the Lord for His followers, and which He was the first to walk Himself, is the way of the Cross. It is demanded of them to practise self-denial, to subdue their obstinate hearts, to trust in Providence, to renounce everything evil. There must be eternal vigilance, incessant struggle against the world and sin, and the faithful observation of His commandments. Difficult it may be to comply with all these demands, but "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity" (Rom. VIII, 28), and He will give us the will and the strength to perform good works. Again, what has he

to fear in death who in his life has endeavoured to be like Christ, to imitate Him in life, and to sanctify himself by fulfilling God's Will and by patience in cross and suffering? The Saviour promised that "He that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. VII, 21), and the Apostle says: "Those who suffer with Christ will be glorified with Christ" (Rom. VIII, 17).

You see, dear brethren, death and the grave lose their terror if we believe in Christ, the Son of God; if we make use of His merits and imitate Him in our life. Oh, let us therefore flee sin, keep God's commandments, and let us zealously use the means of salvation provided by the Church, so that we also may say: "For us to live is Christ: then to die will be our gain." Let us now pray for the deceased.

LI

OUR TRUE HOME

Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall shew thee (GEN. XII, 1).

MY friends, the words that the Lord once spoke to Abraham: "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall shew thee," were spoken these days to our departed sister. Suddenly stricken, her sickness prevailed over the skill of the physician; then she, too, had to leave her father's house and this earth, she had to part from her kindred and from all she loved on earth. And her fate will be the fate of everyone of us, sooner or later; we shall go forth out of our earthly home, out of the place where we were born and where we are passing our life, and part from everything that we love and treasure here below, "for we have not here a lasting city," says the Apostle, "but we seek one that is to come." The earth is not our home; it is the place of our pilgrimage to another home, to our true home, known to us by the faith. "For we know," says St. Paul, "if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven" (2. Cor. V, 1).

Indeed, our true home is not here below. The word *home* suggests a place of rest and peace; but in this world there is no true rest and peace. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare," says pious Job (VII, 1), and our daily experience proves this to be true. Day by day we have to war with the foes of our salvation, with the Evil One, with the world and the

flesh, which are never letting up on us, but lay their traps and snares and put obstacles in our way; withal, we have to work for our daily bread amid cares, troubles, and worries untold, and endure pain and affliction besides. Verily, "as a servant longeth for the shade, as the hireling looketh for the end of his work" (Job VII, 2), so do we all long for a better home, where there dwells enduring peace. The word *home* implies a permanent abode of our kindred. Here below there is no permanence, "for it is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. IX, 27). Of this we become convinced every day. Probably there is not a single person among us who has not buried father or mother, husband or wife, brother or sister, son or daughter, friend or neighbour; and the hour will strike for each and everyone of us, when we must go forth out of this country, when we have to part from kin and friends, to go into the land which the Lord shall shew us.

We are not created for this earth, but for God and everlasting blessedness. This we shall find in heaven, our true home, where there is nothing to afflict us, no unrest, no strife, no poverty, no cares, no sickness, no suffering, no death. "Behold," said the voice from the throne, describing this home to St. John the Apostle, "behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow" (Apoc. XXI, 3, 4). Hence, there will be nothing to cast a gloom over us, but everything that can make us truly happy. There we shall see God as He is (John III, 2), and in His sight we shall enjoy a bliss and rapture which no human eye has seen, nor heart has tasted, which is past all comprehension, and this blessedness will be unchanging and everlasting. "The children of men," so assures us the Psalmist, "shall be

inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, Oh Lord, they shall praise thee for ever and ever" (Ps. XXXV, 9, 10; LXXXIII, 5). Who would not wish for this beautiful home, who would not exert all his strength to win it? And how *can* we win this home?

"There is a way, which seemeth just to a man," says King Solomon, "but the ends thereof lead to death" (Prov. XIV, 12), and to perdition. This is the way walked by the unbelieving, the lukewarm, the proud, the uncharitable, the unchaste, the covetous, gluttons, and drunkards, the slanderers, in short, all sinners. They think their way is the right way because it gratifies all their evil desires; but the end thereof leads to death and damnation. "Woe to the wicked unto evil," says the Spirit of the Lord, "for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Isa. III, 11). Where, then, is the right way to our eternal home? The right way is, in the first place, the way of the faith: for we have the word of the Saviour that "he that believeth shall be saved" (Mark XVII, 16). It is, furthermore, the way of the divine commandments; for, when the young man asked of Jesus: "Good master, what good shall I do, that I may have life everlasting?" He told him: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. XIX, 16, 17). The right way is, finally, the way of the Cross: for the Saviour said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke IX, 24).

It behooves you to examine yourselves, my dear brethren, whether you are walking this way; whether you firmly believe in all that God has revealed, and that He prescribed by His Church to be believed; whether you have kept the commandments, and endured your sufferings and tribulations

with patience. And should your conscience reproach you with fault, with having been lukewarm and indifferent in fulfilling your religious duties; with having deviated from the way of the commandments and walked the way of sin and vice; with having complained of the cross imposed upon you by the Lord; then there is no other way for your salvation and to the heavenly home but the way of penance: for the Lord says: "Unless you shall do penance you shall all likewise perish" (Luke XIII, 3).

Hence, do penance without delay, for man knoweth not his own end. To our departed sister was granted time for penance, and she took advantage thereof to prepare for a good death. Whether the same grace will be granted to us, we do not know. Therefore, let us make conscientious use of the time allowed to us by the Lord, to make sure of entering our heavenly home, by a penitent life, by keeping the divine commandments, and by patiently enduring our visitations in this life. Now let us pray for our departed sister.

LII

OUR HOPE IN DEATH

The just hath hope in his death (Prov. XIV, 32).

The things which human nature dreads most are death and the grave. But, dreadful and horrible as death may appear to human nature, and however repugnant and awful may be the thought: Thou must die once, thou must part from whatever is dear to thee here below, there is, according to the word of the Holy Ghost, hope in death for the good, and he may look forward to it with composure. Why, indeed, should the righteous be afraid of death, why should he not die in consolation and hope? What else does death mean to him, but the end of all earthly hardships, and the relief from a heavy, oppressing burden? To the just death means the evening when work ceases, and rest and refreshment are awaiting him; a peaceful sleep after a hard day's work, the end of a perilous pilgrimage and of the struggle with the foes of his salvation; it means to him the harvest reaped from the sowing of tears, and the return to God, his Father in Heaven.

Yes, dear friends, this is what death means to the just. Looked at in this light, does not death lose its awful aspect? It certainly does. As the prisoner rejoices when the door of his cell is unlocked, as the labourer is glad when evening comes, as the soldier rejoices when the war is over and he can return to his home, as the tiller of the soil is glad when harvest time comes and he may gather the fruits of his toil, as the wanderer rejoices when after a long absence he again crosses the threshold of his father's house, so the righteous may be glad when death comes; for death relieves him of the burden of all earthly sufferings and hardships; it sets free the soul imprisoned in his body and takes it home, into the heavenly glory, where it will

rest from toil and hardship, enjoying the fruits of its victory over the foes of salvation, the fruits of its virtues, rejoicing eternally in God and in the glory of God. Indeed, the just may be hopeful in his death.

Quite different it is with the death of the unrepenting sinner; he does not meet his death with comfort and hope. He cannot see in death a friend that will introduce him to a better life, but rather a messenger of the divine wrath, who will arraign him before the Judge. During his life he has never thought of God, nor of Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent for our redemption; nor has he ever complied with the commandments and the promptings of his conscience. How, then, shall he prevail before the judgment seat of the Lord? "It is a fearful thing," so says the Apostle, "to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. X, 31). Alas, the unregenerate sinner has no hope in his death, he must look forward to it with fear and trembling.

My friends, who among us would not rather look forward to his death resignedly and without fear, as does the just, than meet it with fear and trembling, like the sinner? As yet we are free to choose, but soon, maybe to-morrow even, we shall have a choice no longer. If we now repent sincerely of our sins and offences, if we do penance and reform, then we, too, may look forward to our dissolution with hope, for it is written: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God and the torment of death shall not touch them" (Wisd. III, 1). "But the just shall live for evermore: and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 16, 17).

This crown, so we hope, is the part of our good and truly Christian brother. But inasmuch as "the heavens are not pure in his sight" (Job XV, 15), and since the divine Judge may discover blemishes even there where man sees perfection, let us pray.

LIII

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF LIFE

For we know, if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven (2. Cor. V, 2).

Whenever we stand at a grave, we are forcibly reminded of the different views that men have of life and death. Some men think earth is Paradise, because they themselves are prosperous; another man, bowed down by affliction, declares it is a valley of sorrows. The former thinks life beautiful, and wishes to live long; the other man is tired of life, wishing for the end. The former sees in death the greatest evil, because it threatens to put an end to all his pleasures; the other man, however, welcomes death as his benefactor, as a friendly messenger of peace, for ever ending pain and misery and leading him to rest. Such are the opposite views of men on life and death, but neither of them will bring the desired peace to man. The delight of the happy man in his merry life is marred by the thought of its shortness; whilst the unhappy man sighs under his burden. Neither this happy nor this unfortunate man is finding here on earth the desired rest and contentment. It cannot be, however, that God has created man to live only a life that fails to give satisfaction, only a life which no one can fully enjoy. Christianity gives us another view of life and death, one to satisfy us whether we are happy in this world or unhappy; it establishes the true connection between time and eternity. "We know," says the Apostle, "if our earthly house of this habitation [the body] be dissolved,

that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven."

Our departed brother took this proper view of life and death; therefore he never lost patience in all his sufferings, he looked forward with joyful expectation to the better life and endeavoured to please God, so that he might be received into the better life. And these sentiments ought to be ours, also, my brethren.

1. We should not lose patience with the present life. Life on earth is not what men would like it to be; it is full of afflictions and adversity, as everyone knows by experience. "Great labour is created for all men," says Holy Scripture, "and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their mother's womb until the day of their burial into the mother of all" (Ecclus. XL, 1). While we know that the earth is replete with the bountifulness of the Lord, there is so much change of sorrows and joys, of want and plenty, of fear and hope, and so on, that man can never fully enjoy this life. True, there are some few whose propitious star never seems to set, who seem less exposed to the vicissitudes of life and to oppressing hardships than others; there are even some whose every day in life seems to be a feast day, full of joy; but all this loses its value the very moment they consider that everything is vain and passing. Death cuts short all their pleasures.

Who, I ask, can fully enjoy life with the thought ever present that the next day may not find him alive? This alone suffices to embitter our life, but still more aggravating is the fact that we are unable to reach our goal in this life. True, the aim proposed to us is happiness, but where do we find it? After a life of even seventy years, or more, after all its struggles and battles, shall we have attained the goal of our wishes? Shall we be more contented then, more cheerful than in the

days of our youth? Instead of that, what have we really gained but an enfeebled body, impaired senses, pains, and the nighness of death? Such is the net result of our life. Who will not get disgusted with this life, when ultimately he sees nothing ahead of him but death, the tomb, corruption?

But this is taking a one-sided view of life. Christianity shows us life in quite a different light. It tells us the present life is but the beginning, to be continued in the hereafter: here, below, we sow; yonder we shall reap. We must bear the heat and the burden of the day while we are here; but when the work is done, and the evening has come, then we, too, shall hear the words: "Call the labourers and pay them their hire." Hence, life on earth contemplated in conjunction with eternity will present a different aspect, and we recognize that "we walk by faith and not by sight" (2. Cor. V, 7); that we cannot find and enjoy perfect bliss in this life, but can only hope for it through the faith, and expect it in the hereafter. This contemplation will reconcile us to our life on earth. No matter if our earthly frame will collapse, God will build us a better house: no matter, if our earthly toil will yield here nothing but death, in the realm above we may look for magnificent reward.

How, then, can the Christian be dissatisfied with this life? It is not in vain that he lives, works, and watches, for he will reap the fruit of his toil in the hereafter. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," says Holy Writ; "going, they went and wept, casting their seeds; but coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves" (Ps. CXXV, 5, 7).

2. Therefore the good Christian does not shrink from death. True, bitter and terrible is death. "Oh, death," exclaims the wise man in Holy Scripture, "how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possession, to a man that is at rest and whose ways are prosperous in all things."

But he adds: "Oh, death, thy sentence is welcome to the man that is in need, and the man whose strength faileth: who is in a decrepit age, and that is in care of all things, and to the distrustful that loseth patience" (Ecclus. XLI, 1–4). Even in affliction and sickness man does not wish for death though he may have nothing in life to hope for. Faith alone is able to sweeten the bitterness of death. For our faith teaches that the righteous will be delivered by death from all sufferings and taken into a life of bliss everlasting: that in death he will gain infinitely more than he loses. Here we are strangers only, pilgrims without a lasting home; death puts an end to this pilgrimage and conducts us into our eternal home, where there is no pain, no sorrow, but joy and glory everlasting. Such are the hopes and prospects held out by Christianity; and, hence, should the devout Christian fear to die, to become united with the Lord for ever, and to participate in His glory?

3. The devout Christian will leave it to God, whether he shall live a long life, or die an early death; he will endeavour to please God by means of a steadfast belief, by virtue and good deeds, by the faithful performance of all his duties, by patience in adversity, so that in the hour of death he may hear the gladsome words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

This was the light in which our departed brother viewed life and death. He endeavoured to lead a Christian life, he accepted the visitations of the Lord with devout meekness, and died fortified by the holy rites, resigned to God's holy Will. Hence, we may hope that he has died the death of the just, but let us pray for him.

LIV

THE UNCERTAINTY OF BEING SAVED

Man knoweth not, whether he be worthy of love or hatred (Eccl. IX, 1).

My dear brethren, St. Bernard once went upon the pulpit, stood there for a time in silence, and then broke forth in tears. This, of course, threw the whole congregation into consternation. At last the Saint broke the silence, saying in mournful and plaintive voice: "I am filled with sadness by the thought that not all those assembled here may be saved. Who, indeed, knows whether I myself shall be saved?" In fact, not one of the hundreds there assembled could say positively that he would be saved. "Man knoweth not, whether he be worthy of love or hatred," said King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Ghost. Did not even the great Apostle, though he had visions of things that no other man ever saw,— did not even he fear that he might be condemned? "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection," he writes, "lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway" (1. Cor. IX, 27). This truth is suggested to our minds, also, whenever we are standing at a grave. To our question, whether he has been saved, there is no positive answer. We can only hope so, especially if he has led such a Christian life as our departed brother did, and, like him, was reconciled before death with God. Yet we cannot know whether he has been found entirely without spot and blemish before the eyes of the strict Judge, to whom nothing is hidden; therefore we shall pray for the peace of his soul, and shall offer in his behalf the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, that the

merciful God may be gracious to his soul, for the sake of the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What, however, had we better do, considering that we are, as it were, suspended between heaven and hell, and nobody is sure of his salvation? The Apostle replies: "With fearful trembling work out your salvation" (Phil. II, 12), and "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed, lest he fall" (1. Cor. X, 12). To work out our salvation, we must first of all become reconciled to God if we have sinned, by sincere penance, by avoiding sin, thereafter, and by entertaining in our heart a profound hatred for sin; but not only this, we also must keep the commandments to manifest our love for Him; for the Saviour says: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John XIV, 21). St. John also writes: "He who saith that he knoweth him and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1. John II, 4). The hatred for sin, the careful avoidance of sin, and the keeping of the divine commandments, are sure signs that the Holy Spirit dwells in such a soul, that it is a vessel that will be chosen for eternity.

To work out our salvation, we, furthermore, must repent even lesser sins, beg from the bottom of our heart for the Lord's forgiveness, renew our good resolutions, and follow henceforth obediently the promptings of the Lord. Finally, we must willingly submit to the divine Will always and under all circumstances; we must suffer what He desires us to suffer: we must praise and bless God at all times, in hours of peace and in hours of struggle, in hours of comfort as in the hours of adversity: in hours of joy as well as in the hours of distress. This is the highest degree of love of God here below, there is none higher; and for this love God has promised a reward in heaven that passes comprehension. "Eye hath

not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor. II, 9).

And now I ask of you, my brethren, can you say that *you* love God in this manner? Or must you not confess that you are the enemies of God because of your sins and vices, because of your murmuring in trials and distress, because of your indifference in prayer and good deeds? Or, at least must you not confess that your love of Him is cold? If this be so, you can do nothing better than to repent of your sins forthwith, to seek their remission in the Sacrament of Penance, to kindle again your love, that has grown cold, by the fire of the Saviour's love, by means of Holy Communion, and then proceed on the path of love to work out your salvation, with fear and trembling. Let this be our firm resolution from this day on.

But thou, Oh most merciful Lord and Saviour, do not call us suddenly to judgment, but grant us respite for true betterment: let the Holy Ghost move our heart and fill it with a horror for sin, with sincere repentance for past wrongs, a strong will to follow Thy promptings and to submit to Thy holy Will, that we may say with the Apostle: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." And to the deceased grant eternal rest. AMEN.

LV

THINK OF DEATH!

In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin (Ecclus. VII, 40).

When we learn of the death of someone whom we have known well, or when, as to-day, we are standing at the grave of a departed member of our parish, our soul sees death in its devastation, and we are forcefully reminded of the fact that we all are mortal. But then, after we have returned from the place of burial and resumed the even tenor of our way, we usually soon dismiss the solemn thought of death; with the consequence that we are setting our heart more and more on worldly things, lose sight of God, and neglect our salvation. Hence, the admonition of the Spirit of the Lord: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." When should we especially remember our last end?

1. We should remember it the first thing in the morning. When we rise in the morning we do not know whether we shall be alive at evening. "From morning even to night thou wilt make an end of me" (Isa. XXXVIII, 13), said King Ezechias to God, and therefore he spent all day in the service of the Lord. Not being secure from death at any hour, we cannot do better than to think of death the very first thing every morning, recommend ourselves for the day to the care of God and of His holy angels, and act in such a way that if we should die that day we may die in the peace of the Lord.

2. We should remember death especially in the evening. Night is the time when death mostly carries off its prey. Night-time it was when the soul was required of the rich man who had said before retiring: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest, drink, make good cheer" (Luke XII, 20). If you recollect at what hour your relatives have died, your friends and neighbours, you will find that most of them have died at night-time. Hence, the Lord likens death to a thief who enters the house at night, when people are not watching. Remember this when retiring at night. Death may suddenly strike you in the course of the night; so do not go to sleep without examining your conscience, repenting of your sins, praying for God's grace and mercy, and commending yourself to the protection of your guardian angel and of your patron saint.

3. We should think of death, furthermore, when in temptation and in danger of sinning. That we are surrounded with dangers and temptations to sin, with opportunities to sin, you know from your own experience; you also know that it takes great watchfulness, much prayer and struggle, to resist temptation victoriously and not to succumb. An excellent help is the thought of death. Holy Scripture tells us: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." We shall never sin if we earnestly reason this way: "I certainly shall die; *when* I shall die is uncertain; but if I die in mortal sin I shall be lost for ever." The advice of St. Ambrose is: "Imagine yourself as being put into the grave, and you will surely turn your eyes from vanity, and will be careful not to offend God."

4. Finally, we should think frequently of death during the day. He who is about to go on a great journey carefully prepares for it. We all shall undertake, some day, the great journey into eternity, a journey most important, and on our

preparation depends our eternal salvation. Under these circumstances, would it not betray short-sightedness and recklessness on our part, if we were to live at random, unmindful of our fate in the hereafter; if we were never to think of death, let alone prepare for it?

A certain German emperor had his coffin made during his life. He kept the coffin in his bedroom, and took it along when travelling, so as to have this reminder of death always before his eyes. Let us, too, often think of death. No matter which way we look we are surrounded by tokens of death, that remind us that our end, too, will come sooner or later. We are reminded of death by every case of death, in our own family, in the neighbourhood, or in the parish; we are reminded of death by the graveyard, by funeral masses, and by many other things. Let us take to heart these warnings. Thinking of death often, we shall be kept from sin and spurred on to a virtuous and God-fearing life.

Our departed brother often thought of death, especially in the days of his sickness, and he made so careful a preparation as to warrant our hope that his death was a blessed one. Let his example induce you to think of death often, especially when you rise in the morning, when you retire at night, in the hour of temptation, and on other occasions. Ask yourself often the question proposed by St. Bernard: "If I should die now, would I be prepared?" Live so as you will in your last hour wish to have lived. Let us pray now for the departed brother.

LVI

HOW MAY WE BE SAVED?

God our Saviour will have all men to be saved (1. Tim. II, 4).

Whenever a dear and beloved member of a family has departed, it is the survivors' hope and wish that he has died a good death and entered into blessedness, and we are animated by the same wish whenever we give the last honours to a deccased at the burial of his earthly remains. What better could we wish to a deceased than eternal rest and eternal peace? But what we wish to the deceased, we also wish to be ours in the hour of our own death. Then we shall also wish and hope for a blessed death for ourselves, and this is God's Will, too. For the Apostle says: "God will have all men to be saved." What are we to do, that God's Will and our wish be fulfilled? Let us consider this for the benefit of us all.

1. To become blessed, we shall have to avoid, in the first place, everything that would tend to make us wretched in the hereafter. What is this? We shall illustrate the answer by an example. A pious farmer went into his fields after a terrific hailstorm and found all his crops ruined. He looked up to heaven, and said: "My Father in heaven, this indeed is a calamity; but thanks be to Thee that this befalls me rather than mortal sin, which would be even more calamitous!"

Indeed, my brethren, there is but one real calamity, and that is sin. Neither poverty, nor sickness, nor distress, will close heaven to us, but sin alone. All that which we call misfortune we may change by patient endurance into a means

for our salvation; sin, however, can never do anything else for us but bring about our ruin. Hence, our souls, so dearly purchased with the Blood of Jesus Christ, should fear sin more than anything else in the world: for he who earnestly fears sin need fear nothing else. He need not fear God, he need not fear the devil, he need not fear eternity; for sin alone it is that makes death bitter, and eternity dreadful. Therefore, if you have had the misfortune of falling into mortal sin, oh, do not remain in sin! Become as soon as possible reconciled to God by sincere penance; consider that death may come for you when you least expect. Flee not sin only, but also the occasion for sin; for he who loveth danger, shall succumb to danger. Think often of the exhortation of St. Peter, "For he that will love life [meaning, who desires to be saved], let him decline from evil," let him avoid sin and the occasion of sin.

2. "And do good" (1. Peter III, 10). This is the second requisite for attaining blessedness: we must practise good works; for Christ the eternal Truth Himself says: "Every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit, shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire" (Matt. VII, 19). Hence, not only the tree (the Christian) that brings forth evil fruit (who practises evil works) will be cut down and cast into the fire, but also the tree that brings forth no fruit at all, that is to say, the Christian who does not do good works nor practise Christian virtues. Hence, if it is your earnest wish to attain blessedness, then you must practise good works zealously and continuously, begin and finish the day with God, perform your daily task in the name of God, fulfil conscientiously your duties, attend divine service often and with devotion, receive frequently the holy Sacraments, lay in store treasures for heaven by works of Christian charity, bear your daily cross with patience, all for the love of God.

3. The third requisite for blessedness is that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God," as says the Apostle (Acts XIV, 21). Christ, our Lord and Saviour, has preceded us on the way of the Cross, and has gone through suffering to glory, and no other way leads to the eternal life than the way of the Cross. "If any man will follow me," says the Lord, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark VIII, 34), "and he that taketh not up his cross and followeth me is not worthy of me" (Matt. X, 38). In order not to lose patience in cross and suffering, we must bear in mind that our sins have merited even a greater punishment than these sufferings; we must look up to Jesus crucified, since compared with His sufferings ours are insignificant. Finally, we should raise our eyes often to heaven; it will be the reward for all those suffering in patience for the love of God. Beyond, there is no more poverty, no pain, no tears. All afflictions shall cease there and be changed into bliss; after brief suffering in this life, eternal bliss in heaven.

This was also the consolation of our departed brother, who suffered in patience. Having been reconciled to God in his sickness by receiving the holy Sacraments, he offered to God the sacrifice of his pains and sufferings as a penance for his sins, and so we may hope that he has been saved. We all desire to be saved, dear brethren; hence, let us shun sin and all occasion for sin, let us practise Christian virtues and good works, let us take up our cross patiently and follow Jesus: "If we suffer with him, we shall be glorified with him" (Rom. VIII, 17). Now let us pray for the deceased.

LVII

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

I

"There is but a step between life and death" (1. Kings XX, 3).

The human heart is always deeply depressed when someone whom we have intimately known is carried away by death: this impression is even more profound and painful when death comes suddenly and unexpectedly, when we hear in the morning of the death of one whom we have seen in the best of health only the night before. This was the case with our brother, at whose grave we are assembled. He was taken suddenly from the bosom of his family, and an instance like this brings home to us with great force the truth of the words of King David: "But truly, as the Lord liveth and thy soul liveth, there is but one step between life and death."

1. Our life is at all times exposed to death, which is due, in the first place, to the frailty of the human body. Our soul and body are held together by a weak thread, and our body is easily rendered unfit to remain the dwelling of the soul. From the moment of our birth, death is our steady though invisible companion, ever near us, in a thousand different shapes.

2. It is also due to the decree of divine justice. Death is the gate to the divine judgment: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment," says St. Paul (Heb. IV, 27). The Lord will often delay this judgment, but speed it at other times. No one can of himself prevail before this judgment, hence the Eternal God has given a Saviour to

mankind; but He saves those only who on earth endeavour to be saved. For this end every man is allotted the time he needs. Many a one makes no use of this time of grace, but the Lord is indulgent, until His patience is exhausted, and then the tree that bears no fruit is cut down. "Behold, now is the acceptable time," says the Apostle, "behold, now is the day of salvation" (2. Cor. VI, 2). Our day is short, yet long enough to work our salvation; the thief was promised Paradise even on the cross. But with death there expires the time of grace, the respite for penance is at an end. What should all this induce us to do?

3. We should not postpone our penance and conversion, lest death surprise us. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day," counsels the wise man, "for his wrath shall come on a sudden and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee" (Ecclus. V, 8). If we were all pure and holy, there would be no need of dreading death. But since we are sinful it is urgent for us to be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance, to enter in union with Christ, the Source and Dispenser of all graces, in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, so that, fortified by Him, we may subdue our disorderly desires and passions, defeat the attacks of the evil one, remain undefiled by the world, walk the path of the divine commandments, and persevere in doing good up to the last. For only the faithful will receive the crown of life everlasting from the hand of the Lord. Hence, let us cling for ever loyally to the Lord, because death is threatening us daily.

Concerning our dear departed brother, we may hope that death has not taken him fully unprepared, and that the Lord has been a merciful Judge to him. Let us pray for him in the spirit of charity.

LVIII

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

II

Behold, lift up the eyes and see the countries: for they are white already to harvest (John IV, 35).

Dear brethren, we pray often: "Preserve us, Oh Lord, from an evil and wretched death." There is nothing more dreadful than an evil death, because it leads to eternal damnation. But a sudden death is not necessarily an evil death. An evil death may come very slowly, as, for instance, in the case of one who does not pay any heed to God's voice, that warns him to do penance. A sudden and instant death may be a good and blessed death, if the deceased has held himself ready for his summons, and has gathered treasures for heaven by a Christian life on earth. In this event he is rich in God, and his Saviour will be a merciful Judge to him. Let this be said for your consolation in this bereavement. Your father, brother, and friend has departed suddenly, has been unexpectedly taken away from his family; yet, if we consider what a good and true man he was, a Christian father, a good husband, a faithful Christian, who was fond of the house where he worshipped, who frequently received the holy Sacraments, who proved his Christianity by his deeds, and while dying received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, we may hope that his death has been a good death, that he has found mercy in the eyes of the Lord. Events of this kind are bound to make a deep impression upon any heart not entirely devoid of feeling: they clearly demonstrate how puny we are, how quickly our end may come. They call out to us: "Thou art white already to harvest," the reaper may mow you down with his

scythe before you expect it. Let us not disregard this warning, let it reach our heart.

1. When Christ said to His disciples: "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and see the countries; for they are white already to harvest," he referred to the rich harvest for God's kingdom on earth, His Holy Church, for which the Apostles were to reap the harvest by preaching His gospel. Yet we may construe these words also as applying to the harvest reaped by death in all ages of life. Indeed, as the ripe ear of corn drops before the reaper, so men will often fall into the arms of death before they become aware of it. This truth should arouse us from our sleep of security. How indifferent man is! That the last day, the last hour, will soon come seems to be far from the thought of the many. Hence, man unconcernedly gives himself up to his sinful doings. Hearing no reproof, seeing no danger, experiencing no evil results, he thinks he can safely pursue his life of sin. Even when he hears a warning he pays no attention to it, for he thinks there is plenty of time to do penance. Oh, foolhardiness of man! "They are white already to harvest." May these words penetrate your hearts with all their power! God, hitherto silent, will testify against thee. Death will come over thee like a thief at night, and the day of judgment like a warrior. Then thy life is lost, thy respite for penance has elapsed, thou art past help, past redemption. Hence, wake up from the sleep of sin! There is yet time! Make haste and save thy soul! Work out thy salvation with fear and trembling!

2. The words, "They are white already to harvest," humble also our pride. Mortal man is proud of his talents, proud of his earthly possessions, proud of earthly vanities. He thinks them to be his unpierceable shield, his unassailable castle. Thou trustest to thy health and mistakest flesh for thy arm. Thou hast a subtle reason, and thinkest thou canst fathom everything. Then the Lord meets thee, saying: "They are

white already to harvest." Evils soon come over thee, thou dost not see them with thy reason, and art powerless to stave them off. Thou art like a flower: one gust of wind suffices to break it. Soon we shall see thee abed, sick and weak. Earthly goods are dust, which the wind scatters. Hence, do not set hope in transient riches. Humble thyself before the Lord; let Him be thy strength, thy counsel, thy treasure, and thou wilt lay a good foundation for the future. This powerful God be your comfort, too, my brethren.

3. The words, "They are white already to harvest," should encourage us in our faint-heartedness. Thou hast to carry heavy burdens, thou hast fought a hard fight, and a fierce struggle is yet before thee. Thy courage sinks, the hope for victory is fading. Now, then, hear the words of the Lord: "They are white already to harvest." Soon there will dawn a better time, the hour of delivery will soon strike. The goal is nigh, it is almost in sight. Let this revive thy courage, let it fortify thy perseverance in the struggle thou art commanded to wage. Brethren, your sorrow will soon change into joy; therefore, hope and be cheerful.

4. The words, "They are white already to harvest," should arouse us thus to cheerful hope. The Christian should scatter good seed, should lead his fellow-beings to truth, to penance, to love. The labour seems in vain. The call to truth, to penance, to love, is not heeded. Great is the power of darkness. But no, the fields are white already to harvest. Before long thou wilt see the fruits of justice ripen. Victory will soon perch upon the banner of the good cause. What a glorious prospect is offered to us! What sublime hope is tendered to us! Let us work, each in his position and vocation; let us work as long as it is day, that we may reap the harvest when the time comes. "And in doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Now let us pray for the deceased.

LIX

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

III

Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour (MATT. XXV, 13).

IF I should call upon you to tell me the day or the hour of your own demise, what would your answer be, what could it be? Would you not be silent, all of you, and by your silence testify to the truth of the words, "you know not the day nor the hour"? We know when our parents, friends, neighbours, have died; we know how they died; we also know that there will dawn for us the day which will be our last on earth, that the hour will strike that will be our last on earth, within which hour we shall die; but no one amongst us knows on what day, in which hour, this will happen.

We see a sad proof of this truth before us, in the earthly remains of our departed brother. Before this accident he had hardly the slightest idea that he would die so soon, least of all, that he would die in so sad a manner. You see, my brethren, how true are the words of the Lord, "You know not the day nor the hour." Death is provided with a hundred tools to cut off our life, and has a thousand different ways of reaching us, while we, alas, have not a single one to escape death.

If this be so, if of our death we do not know the day nor the hour, nor how and in what manner we are to die, what must we do? Are we perhaps to figure out the probable length of our life? Should we reason perhaps like this: "I am quite young, of good health, I am not given to intemperance and

immorality, I do not expose myself to danger, my parents and grandparents have all reached a very old age; hence, I have a long life before me." Indeed not, my brethren; let us not figure, let us watch. "Watch ye, therefore," says the Saviour, "for you know not the day nor the hour."

Let us watch like the men who wait for their master when he shall return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately, because "blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching" (Luke XII, 36, 37). Let us watch like the wise virgins, that our lamps may be filled with oil when the bridegroom cometh, and we go in with him to the marriage, the kingdom of glory; lest the door be shut to us, as it was shut to the foolish virgins, with the terrible words: "I know you not." Let us watch like the good householder, who does not know the hour of night when the thief may come, so that we be prepared for the thief at any time, that we may appear before the eternal Judge with hope and confidence.

But, alas, who of us is watching in this manner? Who of us is prepared at any hour, at any moment, for the coming of the Lord? Whose soul is in a condition that he need not be frightened if death should suddenly come for him?

A glance at the life led by many Christians makes it manifest that many are not watching for the coming of the Lord.

For instance, is he watching for death who from early morn till late at night has no other thought but, "What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, wherewith shall we be clothed?" and all day long never gives a passing thought to the salvation of his immortal soul? Is he watching and prepared for death who carries in his heart, not only for weeks, but for months, aye, for years, the filth of sin, and never takes pains to drop his bad habits, to atone for his sins, to reform his life? Is he watching and preparing for the coming of death who reck-

lessly courts any occasion for sin, who gives free rein to his passions?

Dear brethren, this is not watching and preparing for death; this means downright foolhardiness — this manner of living as if man were created for this world only and had never to fear death. Let us not deceive ourselves any longer, let us not dare to continue in a condition of the soul which we would rue in the moment of death. Let us shape our life so that we may be able to appear at any moment before the judgment seat of God with hope and confidence. Then, whenever death may come, early or late, expected or unexpected, it will not find us sleeping and unprepared; therefore it will not be an evil death, but a good death, leading us to life everlasting.

To give thought now to our departed brother, let us pray for him in the spirit of Christian charity and let us not judge him. Of course, it is most sad, for some even a calamity, to be thus surprised by death, to be suddenly placed before the judgment of the Lord; yet we cannot look into the heart of anyone, we must be confident that a merciful God has a wise and loving purpose, even when He allows a man to die suddenly. We are all sinners, and should not judge our fellowmen. "Judge not, and you shall not be judged," says the Saviour. To judge is the privilege of God, to pray is our privilege. Therefore let us pray for the deceased.

LX

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

IV

Man knoweth not his own end, but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in the evil time, when it shall come suddenly upon them (Eccl. IX, 12).

Hale and hearty, in the full vigour of life, we saw him but a few days ago, my friends, and now we behold him in his grave, slain by a sudden death. Who could have told him even on his last day on earth: "The time of thy pilgrimage here below will be ended, ere this day is passed"? Without even a feeling of indisposition he left his home, attended to his business in the usual way, but, behold, in the evening he was suddenly stricken, and, alas, death claimed him within a few hours. What a terrible blow for his wife and children! In him the word of Holy Writ has been fulfilled: "Man knoweth not his own end, but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in the evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them."

What a crushing demonstration of our nothingness and frailty! Our thoughts involuntarily turn to the end that soon, very soon, is to come to all of us. We learn to bow before Him, of whom King David sings: "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." What are we, who are often so proud of our strength, of our money, so full of self-reliance, without considering that all flesh is as grass and all glory of man as the flower that withers? What are we, pray, to put off to a distant time the most important

business of our life, without considering there is but one step between us and death? Indeed, only a little step, but great in importance, and we must realize: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. X, 31).

What are we, pray, to scheme and plan incessantly how to make our earthly fortune, but to banish all thoughts of death, of eternity and judgment, and forget the injunction of the Lord: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come" (Matt. XXIV, 42)? A sudden death is not always an evil death; a sudden death is a good death if the soul is in grace, if remission of sins has been found, and the peace of God acquired, by the worthy reception of the Sacraments. In this way we are ever ready, ever prepared to return home; and whenever the Lord may call us, we may say: "Come, Oh Lord, I am waiting for thy salvation." But woe unto us if death should take us unprepared; if we have not done penance during our life; if we have failed, like the foolish virgins, to provide oil for our lamps, to wit, meritorious works which will be put to our credit on the day of reckoning! What terror would then strike us at the judgment! What a dreadful fate would then befall us for all eternity! God save us from such an evil, from such a sudden death!

A single moment will often determine our eternal woe or eternal bliss. Our departed brother has led a good life, as we are all aware. He was a devoted and loving husband and father, faithful in performing the duties of his vocation, supporting and promoting to the best of his ability all that is good. He was regular in attending the divine service, and came often to the holy table of the Lord. Hence, we may hope that God, who is gracious and whose mercy endureth for ever, will be to him a merciful Judge, and receive him into His kingdom.

Oh Lord, let this soul be commended to Thee, and grant

him life everlasting and the joy and bliss of Thy kingdom. Give also comfort to the bereaved family, and let them realize that Thou hast decreed the death of their husband and father in Thy inscrutable Wisdom. Take them under Thy guardianship and Thy protection, and grant them that in due time they will meet the departed in Thy kingdom and in the sight of Thee!

May this sudden death be a solemn warning to all of us, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to be free from sin, to practise good works, and to bear in mind the words: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not when the Lord will come." Yes, let us watch! Let us watch over our heart in its thoughts, desires, and inclinations; let us watch over our words, over our ways, that we may be ready when our hour strikes to depart peacefully. Let us watch: for "blessed is that servant, whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing" (Matt. XXIV, 46), and let us pray lest we fall into temptation. Let us pray for the deceased that the Lord may receive him into His kingdom.

LXI

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

V

I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan (2. Kings I, 26).

With this lamentation King David mourned the death of his friend, Jonathan, the son of Saul. "I grieve for thee" is also our mournful plaint at the coffin of our dead friend. Unexpectedly soon came his death; only a few days ago he was active in business, passing his last evening with his family in seemingly the best of health, yet he expired that very night. Oh, what sad change! But let us bow to the Lord, who "killeth and maketh alive, bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again, who maketh poor and maketh rich, who humbleth and exalteth" (1. Kings II, 6, 7). He who is now sleeping the sleep of death had no idea that he would have to depart so soon, he had no time for special preparation for his step into eternity. True, he was always guided by the word of the Lord: "By what doth a young man correct his way? by observing thy words" (Ps. CXVIII, 9). True, he did compass the altar of the Lord, where the voice of his praise is heard, and all of his wondrous works are told (Ps. XXV, 6, 7). True, he regularly received the holy Sacraments, and his heart was inclined for everything good; true, also, that "man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred" (Eccl. IX, 1). Yet we may hope that the Lord has been a merciful Judge to him, but we must not fail to recommend him to the grace of God, to-day and often hereafter. But if even youth is stricken down suddenly, if the young man at the very in-

ception of life has no firm foothold, what can we expect in the middle of life, what can those expect well on in years? Our foothold is far more uncertain than that of youth; we are far more likely to be stricken by a sudden death. "We grieve for thee," thus speak his bereaved parents, but it is their good fortune to add, "in him we were well pleased." Many a hardship is suffered till the child and boy grows to be a young man. Many a sacrifice they made, many an hour of sleep lost, many things they denied themselves for his sake. But they tasted the joy of seeing their pains rewarded, their work crowned. It is distressingly sad to be despoiled of all this joy with one cruel blow. The deceased was a grateful and obedient son, fond of his parents, loyally helping his father in his business, and his earnest aim was to become a good and useful member of society. Now this good son has been suddenly taken from his parents, who were so well pleased in him, and who had all reason to expect of him support and joy in days to come. Hence their tears, hence their plaint: "I grieve for thee." They have lost much, yet they hope that the son has gained rather than lost, that he has found grace before the eyes of the Lord. "We grieve for thee," say his brothers and sisters, with whom he was united by the bond of tender love. "We grieve for thee," comes from the lips of his companions, and their souls are mournful because of his sudden death. "We grieve for thee," is the parting word of all of us, yet we shall not argue with the Lord, whose ways are inscrutable, and we hope that he has entered upon his heavenly inheritance. It behooves us to profit by this death, taking at heart the words of the Saviour: "Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not the Son of Man will come" (Luke XII, 40). Let us pray for the deceased.

LXII

IN CASES OF SUDDEN DEATH

VI

To all of us death will come, but we do not know in what shape it will come. It may be likened to a storm cloud in the far distance, about which we are uncertain whether it is coming our way or not, until it suddenly overwhelms us with darkness and disaster. Death often comes like a bolt from the blue sky. At other times death comes like an angel of peace, brightening the features of the dying with an expression of eternal bliss. Often death comes as a messenger of doom, and the torments of hell begin already when the departing soul writhes in the agony of death. Then, again, death steps in gently, the dying person remaining conscious to his last moment, blessing and comforting the dear ones that surround his bed. Sometimes the reason is dulled, the senses are impaired. This was the manner of death which the Lord sent to our brother at whose grave we are assembled. Who amongst us can know what manner of death he will die? Indeed, we have every cause to pray with David: "Keep thou my soul and deliver me; I shall not be ashamed, for I have hoped in thee" (Ps. XXIV, 20). But what are we to say of a death in unconsciousness?

1. For the righteous such a death is not a misfortune. True, it is a sad death, without prayer, without comfort, preparation, yet our salvation does not directly depend upon the manner of our death, but upon our belief and virtue; for the Saviour said: "He that believeth in me hath everlast-

ing life" (John VI, 47), and St. Paul says: "Godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."

2. The case is different with a man who could not be moved to do penance, either by the kindness or the wrath of God. A man who abused God's patience and forbearance, employed his talents in the service of sin, who carelessly postponed his conversion, for him to die unconscious is a calamity, for "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. X, 31).

3. This is a solemn call to all of us to avoid sin and to strive after justice and virtue. It is often impossible to prepare for a good death in the last hour; hence, be watchful and work out the salvation of your soul in your days of health. There is but one step between life and death, and our manner of death is veiled in mystery. Let us, therefore, live so that death at any time may lead us to the Lord, that our end may be a blessed one, whether we pass through the gate of death conscious or unconscious. We shall now pray for the deceased.

LXIII

IN CASES OF GREAT SUFFERING

I

If we suffer we shall also reign with him (2. Tim. II, 12).

Great and manifold are the sufferings and adversities man is exposed to while he walks on this earth. But great and glorious are the promises that the faith holds out to him who accepts the sufferings and tribulations of life devoutly, and bears them patiently for the love of God. Of all these promises I shall select a single one, here at the grave of our brother who is now delivered from all his sufferings, and I shall offer for your consideration the promise contained in our text: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." This means, if we suffer with the resignation and meekness of Jesus; if we suffer with the patience with which Christ suffered, when false witnesses accused Him, when they mocked and blasphemed Him and pronounced an outrageous death-sentence upon Him. If we suffer with the courage of Jesus, who was obedient unto the death on the Cross, and persevered amidst the most intense pains until all was finished, then we shall, in the hereafter, also reign with Him, and shall share His glory for ever.

This, my brethren, is the divine promise for the devout sufferer. Tell me, could any better promise be made him? What else could better give him the courage and strength to bear even the greatest sufferings with patience and resignation, than the prospect of the great reward promised to those who persevere to the last in virtue? Think of it, my

friends, the Christian sufferer is to reign with Jesus, the Son of God. He is to share in the glory and beatitude of the Son of God, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven, magnificent beyond all comprehension. Think of it, he is promised this abundant reward, if he only endures the brief sufferings of this pilgrimage devoutly, patiently, and courageously, following the example of Jesus, his Lord and Redeemer. He who firmly believes in this promise, who never loses sight of this glorious reward, will never complain when visited by the Lord with cross, and affliction; he will rejoice in his distress, because of the opportunity it affords him to merit the great and esteemed honour, once to reign with Christ, his Lord and Saviour. "If we suffer we also shall reign with him."

Hence, you who suffer and are afflicted, do not forget that a great and glorious reward is promised to you, if you will only bear your sorrows with meekness and patience according to the example of Jesus. Therefore in all your troubles look up to Jesus as your sublime Model, and follow in His steps. Suffer and endure like Him, with devotion, with meekness and patience. Then you shall once reign with Jesus, and be His companion in the glory and bliss of heaven.

We hope that our departed brother is sharing this honour and bliss. His measure of sorrow was no small one, especially was his last sickness a painful and protracted one, but he always suffered and endured like a good Christian, according to Christ's wish and example. Hence, we have good reason to hope that now he is reigning with Christ and rejoicing with Christ. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Let us pray.

LXIV

IN CASES OF GREAT SUFFERING

II

Whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple (Luke XIV, 27).

Our divine Saviour did not come to earth in quest of joy and comfort, and while He might have remained in glory, He chose the Cross. And He took up a heavy Cross, a Cross of humiliation, of ignominy and great suffering. He carried it in obedience and love, and died upon it.

It is this cross-bearing Jesus who calls out to us, "Whosoever wants to be my disciple, must take up his cross and follow me." Thus two things are demanded of us — first, to take up the cross, and then, to follow the Lord. Merely to accept the cross and carry it does not make a true disciple of Jesus. Suffering is the unavoidable fate of all men. But to follow with the cross our divine Lord and Master, this is the mark of the true Christian. What mortal man, indeed, is exempt from the adversities of life? They will befall the virtuous and the wicked alike, the faithful and the godless; no one can escape them, they are part and parcel of human nature. It is a different matter to put up with adversities because they must be endured, or to accept them with humility as a trial sent by a kind and loving God. To bear the cross with murmuring and grumbling — or to humble ourselves at the hand of God, and to learn from the Cross to be patient and confident, to despise the world and to acquire merit for heaven. This is meant by following the Lord, bearing the Cross.

Of our departed sister, at whose grave we are assembled, it may well be said that she has borne a heavy cross. She has enjoyed but few days of health, whereas for years she has almost continuously been chained to her sick-bed and had to suffer great pain. But she suffered in patience. Renouncing any hope for a happy life on earth, she rested her hopes in a better life, whereof it is written: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Now her sufferings are at an end. When the days of her trial were full, God relieved her of her cross by sending death to her. He summoned her soul, and if, as we hope, she has found grace before His eyes, then this body which we are consigning to the earth will be resurrected to glory on the day of judgment, the corruptible will be changed into incorruption, and that which has been frail and perishable will be changed into everlasting glory.

This is the promise that Jesus left to those that are His. This is the reward for the cross borne with patience. If anyone of those who, having carried their cross and followed Jesus in their earthly life, are now reigning with Him, could talk to us, what would he say? He would say: No better proof of His love has God given to me than when He visited me with adversity. My seeming desolation proved to be my salvation. My cross has brought me into heaven. If I had not been reminded so forcibly that all earthly things are perishable, I might have lost my immortal soul. Had my days been always happy, without struggle, toil, and pain, the day of eternal bliss might never have dawned for me.

Thus would speak to us the voice from the mansion of blessedness, but we do not need to be thus told. The Holy Ghost has taught this in the Holy Scriptures, and this grave reminds us of the words of the Apostle: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." Let us pray now for the deceased.

LXV

IN CASES OF GREAT SUFFERING

III

The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us (Rom. VIII, 18).

There are a thousand different ways leading to death, and all of us are on the way to the grave, which we are certain to reach some day. And the ways are of various kinds — rough and thorny for some, smooth and easy for others. There are those who die a death almost without pain; others die in great agony, after prolonged and intense suffering. The wish is quite pardonable, even for the sake of those near us, to be spared the pains and agony of a prolonged sickness before death. Yet the heavenly Father means our best when He makes us go through sickness before calling us home, and to many a person sickness has become a time of victory and blessing. This thought suggests itself when we stand at the grave of a woman who in her long sickness was enabled to lay up treasures for heaven by enduring her suffering in patience. In all her suffering she was mindful of the promised great reward, and she said, with the Apostle: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." She found in these words her comfort. And her family are comforted by the thought that she has entered the glory she so ardently desired. If, to-day or to-morrow, tribulations and distress shall befall us, if we are taken sick, let us also always bear in mind the

words: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."

Men are often influenced in their worldly actions by the hope of an ample reward, and it sweetens all effort; this we see any day. They will undergo and do almost anything for a great reward. "The hope for a reward is our comfort in our work," says St. Augustine.

If then the expectation of even a temporal reward eases the burden of this life and sweetens its bitterness, what a powerful influence should be exerted upon us by the hope for an eternal reward! What a consolation this hope is in trouble and distress! How it encourages us to endure all adversities with patience! What amount of exertion can equal a reward that has no end? If we submit to great hardships for the sake of a vain and transient gain or enjoyment, how much more willing should we be to suffer and thus merit the everlasting and indestructible crown of heavenly bliss! With this reward in view all toil will be easy for us, all troubles of small import, all sufferings will seem brief and insignificant.

In the Babylonian captivity many Jews were wont to wear a ring on a finger of their right hand with the name Jerusalem inscribed thereon: from the sight of this ring they derived comfort in the remembrance of Jerusalem. We, too, are living in a strange country, under many hardships. If the Jews were comforted in their adversity by the very thought of their city of Jerusalem, tell me, should we not find infinitely greater comfort in our adversities by the thought of the heavenly Jerusalem, God's eternal city? His chosen people will there enjoy a joy everlasting and past all comprehension! Let this thought console us also.

We hope that our departed friend has entered into the joy of the Lord. Let us be consoled by this thought, also, whenever our lot is an unhappy one, in trials and adversities, on

our way of the cross that we have to walk. Let us think, then, of the glory to be revealed in us if we persevere in patience and devotion to the last. Would that all could say at the end of their life, with the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: as to the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day" (2. Tim. IV, 7, 8).

LXVI

IN CASES OF GREAT SUFFERING

IV

The Lord hath delivered me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom (2. Tim. IV, 18).

My dear friends, our departed brother, whose earthly remains we have just consigned to the earth, might have fully subscribed to the words of the Apostle which we are taking for our text; for during his pilgrimage on earth he has borne many pains and tribulations, and he suffered especially in his last sickness most intense pains. From these the Lord has now graciously delivered him, and, so we may hope, has admitted him into His kingdom. He was not afraid to die, he even wished for death as a deliverance from all evil, because he was confident of being received into the joy of the Lord. The hour of death will come for all of us, my brethren, and it usually comes sooner than expected.

Shall we also be able to die in hope? Will death deliver us *from* every evil, or deliver us *to* an infinitely greater evil? I say in answer: Only a blessed death delivers from all hardships and sufferings.

What is a blessed death? Having in mind the example of the penitent thief, people often think it is sufficient to make good use of the last moments of life, to receive the last rites, and they rely on a death-bed conversion. Nothing is more perilous for the salvation of the soul than this mistaken opinion; it lulls the conscience to sleep, gives us a feeling of false security, makes us careless, and lets us remain in sin in the

expectation to turn to God an hour or two before death. But tell me, pray, what are we to think of a Christian who ignores religion in the days of his health, and will serve the Lord only in days of sickness? What are we to think of one who will serve the world, the devil, and the flesh as long as he is vigorous, and who will devote his life to God only when he can no longer serve the devil? Does he know whether the Lord will give him the time, or call him without notice? Does he know whether he will be able when sick to collect his thoughts? Does he know whether he will be granted the strength and grace to be converted? To become reconciled to God will be no easy task for one who has lived a life of indifference and sin, who has grown old in the service of sin.

It is good and necessary to seek in the last hours the grace of God, to receive the holy Sacraments with a penitent heart, and to pray much, it may even for a penitent sinner insure a blessed death: but, to possess hope and comfort, one must be able to say, with the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept my faith: as to the rest there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day" (3. Tim. IV, 7, 8). To die a blessed death we should have proved our faith by good works, avoided sin, and atoned for the sins committed. We must have been tried and not found wanting in patience and in everything good. Then we can, at our death, say with the Apostle: "The Lord has delivered me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom."

Such a blessed death delivers us from the struggles forced upon us by our sinful inclinations and passions, from all evils that follow sin, and also from the toil and labour of this earth, from all worry and want, from hardships, suffering, and adversities of this life. "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may

rest from their labours: for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13). "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. XXI, 4). And "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor. II, 9). "Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 17).

Dear brethren, let us take these words to heart and act accordingly. We all wish to die well, to be delivered by a blessed death from all troubles and sufferings, and to enter the kingdom of heaven. Let us therefore flee sin, let us fight the good fight, to conquer evil, to be tried and proved in virtue, for no one is crowned who is not worthy; and "he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved" (Matt. XXIV, 13). We hope that our departed brother has received the crown, but let us pray.

LXVII

IN CASES OF GREAT SUFFERING

V

I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of affliction (Jer. XXIX, 11).

My friends, if anything can alleviate your sorrow in the loss you have suffered by the Lord's Will, it is the recourse to the God of Love, to whom we all must submit in childlike devotion and humility, even if His ways and directions cause us suffering; because we know by His own words that He has only thoughts of mercy for us, albeit we do not understand His dispositions, and they sometimes cause us grief. A thought that should also help to mitigate your grief is the thought that the departed has been delivered from the long and great suffering which his sickness caused him. It was the example of his suffering Saviour and His grace, that gave courage and hope to your husband and father. He frequently received his Saviour in the Most Holy Sacrament, and thus he succeeded in preserving his patience, in the hope that those who suffer with the Saviour shall also be glorified with Him. The time arrived for his delivery, and, so we hope, also the time for his glorification. No longer does he suffer: he has found that peace that cannot be had in this life. Though it is but natural that you should mourn for him, you should feel, on the other hand, that the Lord has done well, and you must accept His holy Will in humility.

While the thought that your husband and father is suffering no longer should console you in your grief and sorrow, you will derive comfort also in the thought of having nursed

him with loyal and untiring love throughout the days of his long sickness. You may truthfully say that you have left nothing within your power undone for the dear departed. Hence, while you are mourning, you have the comforting consciousness of having performed faithfully your duty of love towards the deceased, who, in his turn, has been ever intent on your welfare.

The thought of having lost the one who has cared and provided for you may cause you anxiety. But excessive worry should be foreign to the mind of the pious Christian: it is incompatible with the faith. It must give way to a childlike confidence in the God of Love, who never will forsake those that are His. He is the counsellor of widows, the father of orphans, the refuge and help for all that are in distress. Hence, turn to Him in prayer and supplication, commend to Him all your ways, put in Him your hope, for He will surely care for those who belong to Him.

Well, then, my dear friends, here, at the grave of your beloved father, surrounding your afflicted mother, whose only hope rests upon God and in her children, enter into a covenant of brotherly and sisterly love. Join hands over the earthly remains of the dear departed with the pledge: We will serve the Lord in cordial unity, in love and peace; we will be the comfort and joy of our mother; we will honour the memory of our dear father by transferring to her our whole and undivided love, by sweetening and cheering her years by our industry and thrift, by obedience and a Christian life. This will aid your mother in overcoming her sorrows and cares, and God's blessing will descend upon such a covenant of love made by God-fearing children. We all shall pray for you, and with you, that the blessing of the Lord be with you all. May the merciful God, who has recalled our brother in Christ, grant him heavenly peace and eternal joy for the sake of Christ! Let us pray.

LXVIII

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

I

Why make you this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth (Mark V, 39).

The Lord entered the house of mourning, went to the bier of the girl, and spoke the comforting words: "Why make you this ado and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." And then He commanded her soul to come back to the body, and she arose from death. The Lord no longer walks visibly amongst us. He does no longer recall our dead to the life in the body, but He does give life, even in our time, to those who belong to Him. Your child belonged to Him, dear parents, for you conveyed the child to Him as His property at its Baptism, and thus on this day He speaks to you also the words of comfort: "Why do you weep? The child is not dead, but sleepeth." Listen to the words Jesus speaks to mourning parents, and take them to heart.

1. He asks: "Why do you weep?" The answer is soon found: "Oh Lord, we weep because our child is dead, the child we have loved so dearly, who has been our joy and hope." But do you suppose the Lord is loving your child less than you do? Has He not shed His precious Blood for your child, too, that it be with Him in blessedness, with the angels and Saints of God? Because He loves it with a greater love than yours, because He knows better than you what is best for the child, therefore He has taken it. Nor does He love you any less because He did this, as will become manifest to you if you

will realize that this way of sorrow is also a way to salvation, to heaven, where all questions will be solved for you. Would you doubt His love because of a loss that really is no loss at all? Then you would not love Him with that genuine and pure love which is revealed in its full glory only in the days of trials. If you answer: "Our child is dead, why should we not weep?" He tells you: "You should not, because —

2. "the damsel is not dead." Of course, if you look at the body, the frame, then indeed she is dead; but the soul, the real being, is not dead. The soul does not cease to live after death; it is received through Christ into a blessed life above, in heaven, where there is no sorrow, no sin, no sickness, to all of which your child would have remained subject if left to complete its life on earth. Your child is not dead, my friends; you have a child in heaven, where it continues to love you, and where you may continue to love it, and in time, when your own hour has arrived, your child, now a blessed spirit, will welcome you in heaven, where the Lord gives joy and bliss everlasting to those who have been faithful. No one can tear us from God's hand, nor can death tear your child from out of His hand; quite the contrary, death led your child to the abode of the Lord. How glorious and blessed is the Christian faith, that offers such comfort to those who die and to those who survive! No, your child is not dead, says the Lord,

3. It sleepeth. The body sleepeth, but the soul of your child does not sleep; it is active and growing in glorious knowledge and blessedness. Because men are prone to cling to the visible, to the body, especially in the case of death of a dear person, therefore the Lord consoles us and tells us with reference to the body that the damsel sleepeth. Where there is sleep, there will be an awakening, and there will be an awakening for the body on the day of judgment, when the Lord

will give us a beautiful, glorified body, imperishable and transfigured. Oh, do not disturb this sweet sleep of your child by too violent grief and loud complaint. In its grave it will lie as in a cradle, and God's angels will watch, until it will come forth to join its beautiful soul in never-ending happiness. Sleep, then, beloved child! Soon we, too, shall lie down to the sleep of death. Let us hope and pray that our awakening may be joyful, that our resurrection be a resurrection to everlasting blissful life. AMEN.

LXIX

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

II

The souls of the just are in the hand of God and the torment of death shall not touch them (Wisd. III, 1).

It was your sad fate, my dear parents, to witness the sufferings and death of a beloved child and to lay it to rest in the grave. Yours have been countless hours of anguish and sorrow, untold bitter tears and sighs. You are in need of comfort, real comfort, and you can only find real comfort in the Lord. The words of Solomon, "The souls of the just are in the hand of God and the torment of death shall not touch them," should turn your eyes to the present happy state of your child, and show you how blessed it is. These words of wisdom give you three reasons why you should be comforted in your bereavement:

1. You must be consoled because you know your child's soul is just, and it is now with God, enjoying the happiness of heaven. It cannot be said of all who die, that their souls are just, for the life of many is stained with sin; but such is not the case with infants cleansed in Baptism from original sin, for there is no guilt in them. It must be a great comfort for parents to know that their children are in heaven, gone there in the stage of innocence, undefiled by sin, gone there to their divine Friend, who promised them the kingdom and manifested His great love for them when He was on earth.

2. The fact that should chiefly comfort you in the death of your child is, therefore, to know that its soul is with God. It

has returned to Him, who had given it to you, whose property it is, to its Father in heaven. Why should not parents cheerfully return their children to God, when their own chief purpose of life is to go to Him, where they hope to meet their children in joy and everlasting bliss? What you could not give them, God will give them, namely, sanctification and perfection.

3. Finally, there must comfort you, in the loss of your child, the knowledge that no torment shall ever touch its soul. Earthly life and suffering are two things that cannot be separated. By an early death God delivers young children from all earthly suffering, and takes them into the kingdom where no tears are ever shed, no pains ever felt. The happy fate of such children is assured, whereas the future of a living child will cause anxiety and worry to parents. Hence, such an early death is not a loss, but a profit for the child. Pain is the part only of the survivors, the pain of parting, but this pain is soothed by the love which does not begrudge the happy fate to the departed, and by faith which elevates us above the world to the glory of heaven and fills us with hope. Hence, let us bow to God's holy Will; let the assurance comfort you that your child is in heaven, and rejoice in the thought of a happy meeting there. But lest this hope be confounded, be careful of your own salvation, and walk the way of His commandments every day of your life; for only "The just shall live for evermore, and their reward is with the Lord and the care of them with the most High. Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 16, 17). AMEN.

LXX

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

III

The children of thy servants shall continue (Ps. CI, 29).

Death will knock as well at the door of the rich man's mansion as at the door of the beggar. Death spares neither old age nor youth, neither talent nor power; death is the ultimate victor, the foe of all life. Oh, Death, what a fearful tribute of tears and sighs dost thou exact from the children of man! What a heartrending grief dost thou inflict upon parents when snatching the beloved child from their arms! Then they weep and wail: "Why must it die prematurely?" And yet, my dear friends, a premature death is not necessarily an evil.

"Happy thou, to die so prematurely," we may well say to an infant that dies within the first years of his birth, after having been cleansed in Baptism from original sin, and born anew as a child of God. Though these infants will not attain the high degree of beatitude that is the portion of those who die a blessed death after a life of toil, suffering, and struggle, yet they will rejoice eternally in heaven, and join in the praise of their Redeemer. "The children of thy servants shall continue," says the Psalmist.

Happier still are those children who die young, but after having learned to know Jesus Christ and to love Him. They die untouched by the poisonous breath of sin, united with Christ in Holy Communion, and thus death is for them a

matter for rejoicing; for such pure and innocent souls will dwell with the Lord in eternal beatitude.

An even happier lot is in store for young men and maidens who, though surrounded by evil example, and tempted by the blandishments of sin and desires, succeeded in preserving body and soul pure and undefiled. Theirs will not only be the beatitude of the innocents, but also the crown of victory reserved for confessors.

In such cases of death we may exclaim: "Happy thou who diest so soon!" For they have escaped the worst, and gained the best. They have escaped a multitude of worries and sufferings that in this life would have been in store for them; nay, more, they are safe from all dangers to their salvation. At their graves we should weep tears of joy, indeed, and praise the Lord for having been merciful and received into Paradise these beautiful, tender blossoms, which in the uncertain soil of this world would be in peril of being destroyed by the frost of indifference, of being killed by the storms of the passions.

Hence, a premature death may often be a great blessing. An early death will, however, be a great calamity for him who, whether old or young, should die unrepenting, after a life of sin. Holy Writ says: "The death of the wicked is very evil: when the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more" (Ps. XXXIII, 22; Prov. XI, 7); and the Lord will command: "The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness . . . there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. XXV, 30).

Whether any of us die early or late is not of chief importance; the main consideration is that he dies a good and blessed death. Hence, I say to you: be ready for a good death, lead a Christian and God-fearing life. Here, at this grave, I wish to warn you to take this main consideration to heart. Lead a pious and good life, you children! Lead a pious and Chris-

tian life, you young men and women! God often summons us in the prime of life. Lead a pious and Christian life, you fathers and mothers! You have to give account not only of your own doings, but of the doings of your children. Lead a pious and Christian life, whether old or young, rich or poor, healthy or frail. Remember the words of Holy Writ: "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin." AMEN.

LXXI

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

IV

Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business? (Luke II, 49).

We are laying to rest a tender flower, prematurely broken by death, but transplanted to a better soil, to blossom forth more gloriously, to unfold into a more perfect flower. The parents are grief-stricken: for children are precious possessions, attached to the parents' hearts by the bonds of blood and love. What can I say to comfort you in your desolation? What else but: Turn to the Lord. I am reminded of the words which Jesus spoke to His Mother when, after three days of seeking, she found Him in the temple in the midst of the doctors. He said to her: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" These same words are now spoken to you from the heights of heaven by the soul of your child.

"Did you not know?" your child is asking. You are Christians, raised in the doctrine of the faith; hence, know you not that the soul does not perish in death? Did you not know that the kingdom of heaven is also destined for children; that they, too, are heirs of blessedness? Did you not know, to die is to gain, especially for those called away while still in childish innocence, untouched by the sorrow of sin? Did you not know that this soul is not lost to you, that it shall be returned to you in joy and bliss? Indeed, you must know it; hence, bear it in mind, and do not grieve.

A higher duty had kept the Saviour in the temple; even as

a child He must be about His Father's business. We, too, must walk the path prescribed by God in our course of life: who can resist what He has decreed in His wisdom, who will oppose His Will? Are not all of His ways good, though sometimes dark and painful to us? Is not your watchword in all vicissitudes of your life: God's will be done? Oh, prove it now that you are sincere, and return willingly to the Lord that which He loaned you for a short while, and humble yourself beneath God's most powerful Hand.

"Because God loved thee, it had to be"; so spoke the angel to Tobias, and you are told this now by the soul of your dead child.

The Saviour's words: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business," tell you where you now have to look for your child, in the abode of the heavenly Father. It is there, where He often transports those whom we most cherish, lest we set our heart too much upon the transient and lose sight of heaven. There we shall meet again with those who have preceded us, when our brief years shall have elapsed. Then our sadness will change into everlasting joy, a joy of which no one can deprive us. The body of your child is asleep; you will see it rise with a cheerful smile when the light of the eternal morning shall come. The bond which unites you with the child is not buried; it becomes sanctified in the love of God. One child less on earth, one angel more in heaven. Let this thought comfort you, for this thought is as true as beautiful. It is for you to lead a life that will warrant you the hope to be again united with your child when your own death comes. AMEN.

LXXII

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

V

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee (JER. XXXI, 3).

THIS hour finds us assembled to lay to rest a dear little child. The hearts of the parents are heavy with grief. They had to give up the only child with whom the gracious Lord had blessed them, the apple of their eye, the joy of their heart, the gem of their love, the one thought of their prayers and wishes. The child is gone, the hopes it aroused are shattered, joy is banished from the heart of the parents. Your heart needs support and comfort, which God alone can give, the God of all comfort, He who smiteth, but also healeth. Let me repeat to you, for your consolation, the words He spoke to Jeremias the Prophet: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee."

Yea, the Father in heaven has truly loved this infant. He loved it before ever it was born; He loved it when He adopted it in Baptism as His child, as the heir of His glory; He loved it when He intrusted it to your loving heart. Because He loved it, He has transplanted it from this uncertain life to Paradise, where it is safe from the withering storms of the passions, from pain and death. In the light of eternity the soul of this child will grow beautiful, and it will be blessed in the divine love and the glory of God. The Father in heaven has drawn it to Him. Happy child! It is perfect, it rests in

the arm of God; it is now with its Saviour. There, dear parents, you will see the meaning of the words: "I love you with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee."

But the merciful God is addressing you all, my friends, with His word, and He desires to impress upon your heart: Do not lose faith in Me, your affliction is but an act of My love. In times of distress, when our way is dark and gloomy, our heart may be tempted to lose faith in God's love and kindness. It may ask even now: Is this an act of love, to take a dear child from our arms?

Listen: "I love thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee."

God's love has never failed. His word has never deceived. Your own life, with all its vicissitudes, is a monument, a glorification of His love. Everything surrounding you proves His love, points to His love. He loved you when He gave you this child, and your gratitude is due Him for the many joyful hours you owe to His gift. He still loves you, though He has taken the child. You know His intention. He desires to draw you to Him with the aid of the child. Yonder, to heaven, He often transports those most beloved by us, lest we set our hearts too much upon the transient and forget our eternal welfare. That is the meaning of the Apostle's words: "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth" (Col. III, 1, 2). Do not become so engrossed in the business of life as to forget to sanctify your hearts; do not neglect the pursuit of the kingdom of God. Praise the holy Will of God, whose purpose it is to draw you; praise it also in grief and sorrow, follow the glorious example that our Lord Jesus has given us.

The words, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love:

therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee," contain a glorious promise of the Lord, an admonition to love Him in turn, and to serve Him faithfully. He will let shine again the sun of joy for you after a gloomy night. And if you walk His way, and serve Him faithfully, then you may expect cheerfully the coming of your own hour of death and in praise of His love you will confess: "Merciful and gracious is the Lord, forbearing and most kind." AMEN.

LXXIII

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

VI

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them (Wisd. III, 1).

My dear friends, our hearts are in sadness, sharing the sorrow of the parents who by death have been despoiled in quick succession of two beloved children. We are giving expression to our deep sympathy and try our best to console them. But in bereavement such as this, human comfort is of no avail. Here we need the comfort of a mightier power, and we shall find it in the Holy Word of God, where we find the consolation we need. Let me offer for our contemplation in this sad hour the words from the Old Testament: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them."

The souls of these children are just. Alas, of not all those who depart from this world may we say that their souls are just. Leaving out of consideration those who knowingly and stubbornly are pursuing the broad way to perdition, we shall consider only ourselves, who, I hope, are all possessed of the wish to be saved. Sin affects everyone of us, making us slothful in doing good. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (John I, 8). "For there is no just man upon earth," it is written, "that doth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. VII, 21). But these innocent children knew no iniquity nor sin. Their hearts were dwellings of the Holy Ghost, whom they received in Baptism. Received into the Church of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they also have partaken of His redemption and salvation. What a

beautiful comfort for parents, to know that their children are still in the stage of innocence when they depart for their inheritance in heaven, departing from this life untouched by sin, and undefiled, to meet their divine Friend in heaven, who promised them the kingdom, and who plainly showed how much He loved them while He was walking among men.

Their souls are just, and therefore in the hand of God. You know where to look for your children; you know their present abode, where they rest securely. They are in the hand of God: they shall there remain for ever, and in due time you will meet them there, in joy and bliss, if you die in the love and grace of God. They are with Him, who has given them to you, whose property they are; they are with the heavenly Father. With all your love you could do little for your children. What you could give them cannot compare with what they are given in heaven. Could they be cared for better, could they be safer anywhere, than in the hand of God?

In the realm of God no torment, no sorrow, can touch them. Nothing but joy in abundance. In this life we are groaning under afflictions and adversities, whereas they have been taken into a Kingdom where no tears are ever shed, no pains ever felt. Their fate is assured, it is eternal glory. Such a death is not a loss, but a gain. A long life on earth means long suffering; he who dies a good death early will attain joy early. The sorrow of the survivors is mitigated by their love, which is joyful of the better lot fallen to the departed, and by their faith, which fills them with the hope of meeting again.

Therefore, dear parents, you should humbly bow to God's holy Will, and take good care that your hope of meeting your children in heaven will not come to naught by your own fault, for the Saviour tells us: "Only he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. VII, 21). AMEN.

LXXIV

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

VII

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God (Mark X, 14).

My dear friends, we have among us a broken-hearted father, a sorrowing mother. The Lord, in His inscrutable wisdom, has demanded from them the sweet child whom He had intrusted into their care only a few months ago. How they treasured their precious gift of God, how happy their home was, what sweet dreams of the future filled their souls, when they held and petted their cherished babe! Now death has come, the Lord has soon recalled the sweet gift, and the parents' joy is changed into sorrow. May the Lord of all comfort, who consoles us in all of our sorrows, console also your afflicted hearts by the soothing balm of His words: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

"Suffer the little children to come unto me." It is the voice, the call of our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Thus He spoke lovingly, while He, the children's truest Friend, was walking on earth, and His invitation will continue to ring forth as long as there are human beings on earth. "Suffer the child to come unto me." It was done, the child was brought to Him in holy Baptism. There our Divine Lord embraced it, gave to it His grace and blessing, and communicated to it His spirit and His life. And now He has spoken a second time to the parents: "Suffer the little child to come

unto me," and again they are words of grace and love, words that have the power of changing sorrow into joy, for new hopes of life and of heaven are rising at the coffin of this little child. The child has partaken of the holy, merciful, and rich love of God. You, my dear parents, must not begrudge your child its great good fortune. "Suffer the little child to come unto me, and forbid her not," says Christ; "do not wish to keep her from me, with me the little child will be safe and well cared for. Because of such is the kingdom of heaven." The child is now enjoying the fulness of heavenly joys. Our imagination is incapable of conceiving the glory of heaven. Undefiled by sin, this child has become a guest at the eternal marriage feast in heaven: it rejoices in everlasting bliss. Since you are sincerely fond of your little daughter, you must be glad that she enjoys the full splendour, the full blessedness, and all the joys of the kingdom of God. This salvation of souls is also the end of our faith (1. Pet. I, 9), and this end can only be attained by the power of God, through keeping the faith (Ibid. 5), by patiently enduring for a little time the sorrows of temptations (Ibid. 6), and by childlike obedience to the law of God. Hence, my dear parents, if you are truly desirous of meeting your little daughter again, and to share with her the everlasting glory of heaven; if we all, my dear brethren, desire to attain the aim of our faith, namely, the salvation of our souls — then let us here firmly resolve to walk henceforth the way of God's commandments in childlike obedience; for the Apostle says: "We are the children of God, and if children heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. VIII, 17).

LXXV

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

VIII

It is the Lord: let him do what is good in his sight (1. Kings III, 18).

Here we are standing again, dear brethren, at the grave of a dear little child. Death is reaping a rich harvest among them, many young buds are broken before they unfold. At the burial of infants, who succumb to the ills of childhood, it is usually not difficult to find a word of comfort for the bereft; it is a harder blow, however, for parents when a healthy and strong child is suddenly taken by death as the result of an accident that might have been avoided. Yet, in the one case, as in the other, it was thus to be by the will and the dispensation of God. Do not, therefore, dear parents, in this heavy visitation give way to doubt and faint-heartedness, but be resigned to the Will of God as was Heli the High Priest when Samuel foretold him great woe, and say with Heli: "It is the Lord: let him do what is good in his sight." He was resigned to his fate, because this was the will of the Lord. It is the Lord who dispenses life and death. No blind fate is here at work, to believe this would be pagan; no, it is the dispensation of the Lord, of the wise and the all-loving Father. Recognize God's hand and will. My friends, bow to His holy Will. It is the Lord. In this thought there is consolation, and the heart becomes resigned and willing to endure.

God had given life to the little child and given it into your care. You, dear parents, have waited upon the young life, have fostered it, and cared for it most faithfully. The child

was a source of great happiness. Now, the Lord has taken back His gift; this is His right: He alone gives life, He alone preserves life, and He has also the undisputed right of withdrawing His gifts in any manner and way He pleases. He is the Lord, let Him do what is good in His sight. Thus speaks the meek and devout heart. Let it be your speech too.

A most unfortunate circumstance caused the child's death. It suffered not, it departed from this life with hardly any pain. So many children suffer for days and weeks in violent pains and die a death of bitter agony. Death has taken your child, as it takes the children of many other parents, but your child was spared all suffering.

"Let him do what is good in his sight." Submit patiently to God's holy Will. He has drawn the child up to heaven, wishing to draw your hearts too, that you may learn to confide in Him, to make His word your guide, His will your law, His approval your aim, and heaven your goal. The little child is now with Him. It has not gone out of the Fatherly hand of God: He will bless it with a richer and more glorious blessing than would have been possible had the child remained on earth. Let this thought be your comfort, my friends, and say: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job I, 21). AMEN.

LXXVI

FOR BURIALS OF CHILDREN

IX

A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted because they are not (Matt. II, 18).

This saying of the Prophet was applied by the evangelist to the mothers in Bethlehem, when all the male infants were killed by the order of Herod. It may be applied with truth also to our parish. A time of great distress has come over us. Death is reaping a large harvest amongst the children. Parents are living in anxiety, with sadness they behold their children, not knowing whether the dread disease will claim them too. Many are those who are mourning the loss of children. Hence, there is lamentation and great mourning in families, mothers are bewailing their children, "because they are not."

Let us share in the mourning, but let us not belong to those who mourn without hope. The higher the waves of distress, the more fervently the Christian will cling to his belief in a divine Providence. This belief is the rock on which we stand; let it be the refuge for troubled souls. Is it not our Father in heaven who ordains all things? Is not His purpose the wisest? He strikes, but heals again; He may humble His faithful, but will never forsake them. Everything He does will be for the benefit of those that love Him. Thus may He do what is good in His sight.

Shall we bewail the children which the Lord took unto Him into heaven? True, the parents sadly point to the graves.

But their children have died in innocence. They were sanctified by holy Baptism, their souls were pure: no sin had as yet defiled God's image within their souls. And the Lord said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of God."

In heaven they are secure and safe. We are exposed to sin; we are in the thick of the fight, and surrounded by danger. They have nothing more to fear, no temptation can reach them. They are in the safest possession of the inheritance for which we have still to work with fear and trembling. Therefore, my Christian parents, I say with St. Cyprian: "You have not lost them, they only went ahead of you: it is not right for you to put on a mourning garb when they are wearing the white dress of joy."

It does behoove us, however, to humble ourselves beneath the hand of the Almighty. If we confess our sinfulness before Him, and, chastened by His visitation, open our hearts to Him, then our loss will be changed into gain. Let us banish all pride, seeing how quickly man is stricken by the hand of God. He who has sinned should repent; those who have rested all their hopes upon this world should think more of the hereafter.

And when disaster threatens, when nothing seems to avail, let us pray with Daniel, the Prophet: "I beseech thee, Oh Lord God, great and terrible, who keepest the covenant, and mercy to them that love thee: we have sinned, and have gone aside from thy commandments. To thee, Oh Lord, is justice; but to us confusion of face. Incline, Oh my God, thy ear and hear: open thy eyes and see our desolation: for it is not for our justification that we present our prayers before thy face, but for the multitude of thy tender mercies" (Dan. IX, 4–5, 18). AMEN.

LXXVII

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

I

Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not (Eccl. XII, 1).

This is the advice, my dear brethren, given by Solomon to young people, and this advice is recalled to mind by this sad occasion, when we bury the earthly remains of a youth who, despite all the temptations to which young men are exposed, remained true to his God and preserved his virtue and innocence. Brought up by Christian parents in the ways of religion and taught to lead a good life, his earnest aim was to be a good Christian and to become a useful member of human society. All the more his premature death must be regretted. His example, however, shows us how well it is to make good use of life. It enabled him to die with much comfort and in good cheer. His blessed death is an encouragement to follow his example, and it calls out to us the words: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not."

1. Solomon's advice is short, but important; it bids us remember God while there is the strength to do good. To curb levity and to protect youth in the manifold temptations it is exposed to, this can only be achieved by the incessant remembrance of God, mindful of the words of the Psalmist: "Lord, thou hast proved me and known me, thou hast known

my sitting down and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off; my path and my line thou hast searched out. And thou hast forsaken all my ways: for there is no speech in my tongue. Behold, Oh Lord, thou hast known all things" (Ps. CXXXVIII, 1–5). Hence, this remembrance of God should be the steady companion of youth, that they be kept from sinning, and be fortified in the fear of God and constant in the exercise of virtue. This thought of God must make up for the lack of youth in deliberation and experience, thus preserving their body and soul undefiled by sin. This is the sense in which Solomon says: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

2. Nothing is more apt to impress this advice forcibly upon young people than the sight of the premature death of a young man: it demonstrates that youth is just as much subject to death, just as near to eternal retribution, as old age. Youth, as a rule, indulges in the hope of a long life, but the death of a young man or young woman is a powerful reminder to them that *they* may share this fate at any time. If this is so, does it not bespeak gross carelessness if they fail to remember their Creator in their youth? Death is especially hard in the years of youth, when life seems so pleasant and sweet. And if the days of youth are not passed in the fear of the Lord, this will make death at that age all the harder. Hence, "remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth"; for you do not know how near the end is.

3. There is nothing more profitable than following this advice; nothing else will vouchsafe the hope of a peaceful and contented life. Neither money nor possessions will insure to man rest, peace, and happiness; neither can they be found in sensuous pleasures, "for the kingdom of God," says the Apostle, "is not meat and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. XIV, 17). This justice, this

peace, this joy in the Holy Ghost, however, will be vouchsafed to those who, with the help of the Holy Ghost, have avoided sin, who have kept the commandments, and have faithfully fulfilled their duties: for Holy Writ says: "Much peace have they that love thy law, and to them there is no stumbling block" (Ps. CXVIII, 165). Hence, my young men and young women, this heavenly rest, peace, and joy, shall be yours if you will be able to look back without compunction upon the years of your youth, if by probity and virtue you have won the grace of God and the respect and love of your fellow-men. Then, if death should come to-day or to-morrow to put an end to your career, you will not have to fear the judgment of God.

This young man, whose earthly remains we consign to the grave, died in peace and comfort because he led a life of godliness. We may hope that he has been received into the kingdom of God and given the reward promised to those who love the Lord. However, let us pray for him.

LXXVIII

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

II

The Insecurity of Life an Earnest Warning to Young People

When Isaias the Prophet was bidden by a Voice to preach, he answered with the question: "What shall I cry?" and he was told by the Lord to preach: "All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen, because the spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it "(Isa. XL, 6, 7). The same Voice bids the priest, upon an occasion like this, to cry to you: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come." I am to remind you of the insecurity of human life. And my words ought to reach your hearts all the more because we are standing at the grave of a young man taken away in the prime of his life, taken from his parents, brothers and sisters. This example of the insecurity of life is a solemn warning for all, but in this case particularly for young people —

1. Lest they give way to levity. Youth is especially inclined to levity, and we cannot be much surprised at this fact. At that age reason has not attained maturity, experience is wanting; the heart, free from cares, takes life easy, it indulges in pleasures without always considering how perilous and injurious they are. Levity is at that age the cause of many foolish acts and transgressions, which may ruin a man's entire life. Young people often do things detrimental to

life and health; they court temptations, and sometimes acquire evil habits that develop into vices. Hence, what is more important than to curb this levity, and what is more likely to curb levity than to meditate upon the insecurity of life? "Behold, thou thrivest like green grass and bloomest like the flowers: but the grass is withered, and the flower is fallen because the spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it." It takes but little to end the life. A severe attack of disease, an accident, and so on, will suffice to end the life of even a vigorous young man or young woman. And who among us is sure that nothing of the sort will happen to him? What person, who has any regard at all for his immortal soul, can take the risk to live frivolously and unconcerned about the fate that may befall him to-day or to-morrow?

2. The insecurity of this life should warn young people not to indulge in false hopes. It is a characteristic of youth to have an exaggerated idea of the value of earthly goods, to take for gold all that glittereth. How attractive are honour, riches, and pleasures for the young! Those who possess these things are considered happy. People strive and struggle from their youth on, in the hope to win these possessions, and to find the happiness that is supposed to go with them. But how sadly do they find themselves deceived! Temporal advantages are fascinating like a beautiful flower, but just as perishable. "Every work that is corruptible shall fail in the end," says Holy Writ, "and the worker thereof shall go with it." But even if this were not so, no man will find true contentment in the possession and enjoyment of the things that life offers him, because, no matter how many of them he has, his heart will always ask for more and will never be satisfied. The more young people strive for earthly happiness, the more they will be disappointed, and finally, after many a bitter experience, they will have to admit with Solomon that

"All is vanity and all the glory of flesh is as the flower of the field."

3. The more we become convinced of the vanity of everything wordly, the more reason for us to inquire how we can acquire true and everlasting happiness. Holy Writ answers: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is all man. Be thou in the fear of the Lord all day long: because thou shalt have hope in the latter end, and thy expectation shall not be taken away" (Eccl. XII, 13; Prov. XXIII, 17, 18). There you see, young men and women, what God demands of you; He wants you to flee from sin and to keep His commandments for the love of Him.

If we do so, our expectation of a true and everlasting bliss will never be disappointed. But do not try and postpone the service of God until old age. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come and the years draw nigh, of which thou shalt say: They please me not." Youth thinks it has the right to enjoy life, that there will be sufficient time to think of God and to prepare for death when the riper years come, but many have been deceived by this reasoning; they embittered their life and shortened it, and laid in their youth the foundation for their temporal and eternal wretchedness. The more urgent therefore the admonition: "Flee from sin, walk in the fear of God and keep his commandments; for he that doth the will of God shall enter into the kingdom of God."

Into this kingdom has been received, so we may hope, our departed friend. Let us, however, pray.

LXXIX

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

III

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass: The grass is withered, and the flower thereof is fallen away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever (1. Pet. I, 24, 25).

My dear friends, some men seem to be endowed with special vitality. In spite of hardship, of toil, even want and disease, they live to an old age, and they almost seem immune against death. On the other hand, only a brief life is allotted to others. The present funeral is an instance. We have laid to rest a young man who recently walked amongst us in vigour and health; he was the joy and hope of his parents, the pride of his brothers and sisters, an honour to our parish. Suddenly the cheeks paled, the strength was broken, the bloom faded. Hence, our deep sorrow and hearty sympathy with the bereft family, but hence also the solemn admonition, to remember that our life is insecure and we are subject to death. It will be of benefit to all of us to devote some thought to this truth.

1. St. Peter says: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass: the grass is withered, and the flower thereof is fallen away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." This applies to man and his glory. This youth, hale, hearty, full of vigour in the morning, was dead in the evening. "For what is your life?" asks St. James the Apostle, and he answers: "It is a vapour, that appeareth for a little while and afterwards shall vanish away" (Jas. IV, 14).

And God Himself told the man who lived in foolish security, "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee" (Luke XII, 20). These words of Holy Scripture point to the shortness of our life on earth.

2. This truth is also corroborated by our own experience. We have here an instance, in the case of this youth. But a short while ago we saw him amongst us in the vigour of life. To-day he is dead. Nor is this a solitary case. Alas, there are many parents who have lost promising sons and daughters of tender years. Yes, my dear parents, many have mourned the same as you do to-day. They have found comfort in the word of the Lord: "What God does is done wisely." Let these words be a balm for your sorrow, as it was for them.

3. Holy Scripture warns us of the frailty of our body, of the shortness of our entire life on earth; it warns us of vain hopes; it reminds us of the judgment to come, and of the accounting that will be demanded of us. Hence, do not rely upon bodily vigour, do not set your heart upon earthly possessions, do not count upon long life; be ready to give up your dearest possession if the Lord so wills; rely upon the living God, who is and remains the same as yesterday and to-day and for ever; watch all the time and be ready with your reckoning, "for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come" (Luke XII, 40).

4. But people will not listen to these words of warning. They live for the day and do not think of the end. They say: "For what hath happened to him, shall not be our lot; the time of our life is short: come therefore and let us enjoy the good things that are present" (Wisd. II, 6). The word of warning is not remembered, not listened to, especially by young people. They think a long life is ahead of them; hence, they defer penance and conversion to later days. The warning is not listened to by men of middle age; they are engrossed

in the ambitions and cares of this life. Even those of advanced age fail to listen to the warning; though standing on the brink of the grave, they seem not to have the faintest idea that death is nigh. "Watch ye, because you know not the day nor the hour," says the Apostle (Matt. XXV, 13), nor do you know whether you will have the time and the grace, as had this departed youth, to become reconciled to God by the holy rites and to prepare for your departure into eternity. Hence, take warning, and lead the life you will wish to have led when your hour comes. For the deceased, however, let us pray.

LXXX

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

IV

All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field (Isa. XL, 6).

Many people lead a life so confident and careless, as if it would never end. Everybody flatters himself that he has a considerable number of years ahead of him; everybody thinks his last hour to be far away: the young man is sure of attaining a very old age, the man of middle age expects to live quite a while yet, and even those of old age are hoping to add to their scores of years. Yet the Prophet says: "All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field." Aye, dear friends, such is life. It is as the flower of the field — in the morning glorying in the brightness of its colours, and at evening faded and despoiled of all its beauty. Oh, do never forget this picture of your life! Especially you, my young friends, do not forget what life is, and imprint this picture upon your soul. You are young and vigorous, and you expect to live many years; but as a matter of fact your life is as the flower of the field, fading all too quickly. Do you want proof? See this dead body! Our sister seemed assured of a long life, yet, while a few days ago she was hale and hearty, she became within a day or two the prey of death and corruption.

Hence, do not be proud of your vigorous health, my young men and women! Do not rest your hope for a long life upon youth, health, strength, and vigour, for all this is deceiving,

and does not warrant an expectancy of long life. No one is too young, too strong, or too healthy for death. Like the reaper at the time of harvest, who mows down with the ripe corn also the unripe, so doth death make no distinction. Since, then, human life is so frail, and not even vigorous youth are exempt from death, what are we to do?

From the insecurity and frailty of the human life we must draw the lesson that it is necessary for us to be ready at all times to die. If death does not spare even youth, what may old age expect? If death should surprise us in sin, it will mean for us not reward, but eternal punishment. You especially, young men and women, should profit from this thought of the frailty of human life, by caring early for the salvation of your soul, and by preparing for a blessed death, because you do not know whether you will live much longer, you do not know whether you will be able to prepare later on for a good death. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not" (Eccl. XII, 1). "Rejoice, therefore, in thy youth, Oh young man, and let thy heart be in that which is good in the days of thy youth, but know, that for all this God will bring thee into judgment" (Ibid. XI, 9). These words advise you to enjoy your life, but in such a way that you may justify yourself before the judgment of the Lord. Enjoy your youth, but beware of offending God!

Even in the days of youth do not fail to do good works. Make a good use of your years of youth, so that should death surprise you in the prime of your life, there may apply to you the words of the Book of Wisdom about the righteous: "Being made perfect in the short space, he fulfilled a long time: for his soul pleased God, therefore he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities. He was taken away, lest

wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul" (Wisd. IV, 13, 14).

My young men and women, if you will consecrate the firstlings of your years in this manner to God and to virtue, then it will not matter when or how soon death will cut the thread of your life. Our sister is, we may hope, enjoying these heavenly joys, because she has led a good and God-fearing life and was patient and devout in her sickness. Let us, however, pray.

LXXXI

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

V

From morning even to night, thou wilt make an end of me (Isa. XXXVIII, 13).

Standing at the grave of a young man who in the fulness of life has been snatched by death from his kin and friends, the question suggests itself: "What is the life of man?" Various are the answers that people will give to this question. Some will say life is the time for enjoyment. The industrious man will say it is the time to work hard, so as to amass as much money as possible. The ambitious man will say it is the time to seek honour; and so on. The open grave, too, has an answer to the question. It says: The life of man is a journey to the grave. Hardly have we begun to live, when we start on our way to death, and with each minute of our life we are drawing a minute nearer to our death.

This was the view of life of pious Job, for he says: "The days of man are short, and the number of his months is with thee: thou hast appointed his bounds which cannot be passed" (Job XIV, 5). This sentiment was expressed by King Ezechias in his prayer: "From morning even to night, Thou wilt make and end of me." There will come a morning whereof we shall not survive the evening, or a night whereof we shall not see the morning. But *when* this is to happen, we do not know. It is known alone to God, who has life and death in His hand. St. James tells us: "Behold now, you

that say: To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and there we will spend a year, and will traffic and make our gain: whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away. For that you should say: If the Lord will and if we shall live, we will do this or that" (Jas. IV, 13–16).

What had we better do? How are we to make use of the brief space of time allotted to us by the Lord? Are we to use it only in enjoying the pleasures offered by the world? Shall we use it only for gathering wealth? No, we must use it to gather merit for heaven; for God has not destined us for this world, but to enjoy eternal blessedness in the hereafter; our time on earth is preparatory for eternity; heaven must be earned by a good Christian life, by practising the virtues of faith, hope, charity, humility, meekness, chastity, and temperance. Therefore the divine Saviour said: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal" (Matt. VI, 19, 20). Treasures of gold and silver, houses and acres, and so on, we shall leave behind us in death, but our treasures of virtues and good deeds will accompany us into eternity; but so will our unrepented sins, — the virtues to earn for us everlasting reward in heaven, the sins to cause our eternal perdition.

Hence, my dear brethren, let us resolve at this grave henceforth to flee sin, and to walk the way of the Lord's commandments. Let us aim to become rich in virtues and good deeds. Then we may hope to find in our Lord a gracious Judge, for Holy Writ says: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they

may rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13).

If we have lived on earth a good life, we shall die a blessed death, and our hope for the heavenly reward shall not be confounded. This hope was the consolation of the deceased in his sickness, and we may hope that it has been fulfilled. Let us pray.

LXXXII

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

VI

The winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. . . . Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come (Cant. II, 11, 13).

These words of the bridegroom to the bride, in the Canticle of Canticles, may be well applied to the departed young woman at whose grave we are assembled. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone." She was in the springtime of life, yet her days were chilled by wintry blasts and marred by torrents of rain: I am referring to the sufferings with which the Lord has visited her. She had been more or less ill for a long time, when she was finally thrown upon the sick-bed, to arise no more. Now her winter is past, the rain is over and gone. She is delivered from all the pains and sorrows of this life, from the temptations that threaten innocence, the rocks where the salvation of many a soul has gone to wreck.

Her tired body is now at rest in this grave, but her soul, so we may hope, is in heaven, reaping an everlasting reward for her patience in her long and intense sufferings. Virgins are the Lord's elect on earth and in heaven. To the virgin soul He says in the fondness of His heart: "Arise, my friend, my fair one, and come."

Under such circumstances where am I to look for words of comfort to the parents, bowed down in sorrow? True, it is hard to stand at the grave of a young and hopeful daughter, who, according to human reckoning, would have become their help and consolation in their days of health and illness.

But what greater joy can there be, what more blissful comfort for the heart, than the knowledge that the beloved daughter has been delivered from her long and intense sufferings, freed from all dangers that threaten the soul in the world, dangers to which so many succumb every day? Remember, you did not get your child from God to make her happy in this life, but in the other life, and if He called her to her reward sooner than you expected, may you remonstrate? I know the blow is heavy, and the bereavement bitter. But the thought of the happiness of your daughter in heaven will help you to become resigned to the Will of God, who does what is best for His children. It behooves us to say, no matter what happens: Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. You, the young friends of the deceased, who have decorated her coffin with flowers and carried it hither in the attire of innocence, pray for her that her happiness be made complete. Prayer is the only and the best thing you can do for her. But have also regard for yourselves. Behold, how quickly death calls us! Avoid sin and the occasion for sinning. Pray and persevere in virtue, for you do not know which among you will be the next one to be brought hither, as this corpse is brought here now. Let us all pray for the peace of the soul of the deceased.

LXXXIII

BURIALS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

VII

He was taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul (Wisd. IV, 14).

The grave has opened for one who in human reckoning died all too soon. Hence, there is good cause for great sorrow; on the other hand, there is good cause for cheerful hope: why, then, the sorrow, whence the hope?

Where the cold hand of death has just been felt, there is mourning. The funeral may be that of a man advanced in years, who had little to hope for in life, yet we miss him with sorrow, we regret that he has gone. The funeral may be that of a feeble infant, yet the extinction of his young life fills one with sadness. With the aged man is buried a past of achievements, with the child is buried a future of hopes. Even more reason for us to mourn when we see a vigorous life cut short, a flower broken in its bloom and faded in death, as is the case with this young man. Who would have thought it possible, but a few weeks ago, when looking at that boy, so full of health and vigour, that the grave would so soon receive him! Your loss is heavy indeed, my dear parents, for he would, no doubt, have been your help and comfort in your declining days. Be not ashamed of your tears, you brothers and sisters; you are mourning a good and loving brother. You have reason to grieve, you, his friends; the heart that beat in true friendship, it has ceased beating. Aye, we all are mourning and with good reason; for there has been taken from among our midst a good and virtuous man, a young man who held out great promise.

But, my beloved, though this loss may be great, look up in devotion to the Lord, who willed for us this loss. What God does is always for the best. We have good cause to temper our sorrow with hope and confidence, for the departed was pious and virtuous. True, in youthful merriment he enjoyed mirth and pastime, but he knew how to avoid the serpent that hides beneath the flowers, ready to fasten its poisonous fangs into the unwary. He knew how to avoid forbidden and sinful pleasures, and he set thereby a good example to his companions. He walked the way of a dutiful son, of a loving brother, a loyal friend, and a good Christian. And in his sickness, when tortured by pains, he endeavoured to imitate the patience of our divine Lord, and when he felt his last hour coming, he asked for the means of grace provided by our Church. Thus he departed, well prepared by a good life and by the holy rites of our faith, to meet the judgment of God.

To us he has left a blessed memory and the hope that we shall meet him again in everlasting happiness. His soul "was taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul." Who knows but that the wisdom of these words may be applied to this case? While we would not expect such a good young man to ever seriously stray from virtue, there is consolation in the thought that his salvation is positively assured. Let us bow then to the wisdom of the Lord, and be consoled, you parents, sisters, brothers, and friends! We may hope that his soul is enjoying the rapture of heaven. Yet, with all his virtues, he too, had his weaknesses, as we all have them. The Lord, of this we may be confident, will consider his patience in enduring the intense suffering of his last sickness as atonement for youthful faults. But, inasmuch as even the least spot bars the soul from the sight of God, let us raise our hands and hearts to the Father of Mercy and pray with fervour: Lord, give him rest eternal. Let us pray.

LXXXIV

FOR THE BURIAL OF A BRIDE

Three Angels of Comfort

And now there remaineth faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity (1. Cor. XIII, 13).

The angels of God have carried into the land of retribution a soul purified by the afflictions of the earth, while we have brought hither the earthly shell to be laid at rest in the grave. She has found peace, and has gone through death to eternal life, while here hearts are bleeding and eyes are weeping, especially those of the parents and of the bridegroom. Great hopes are buried with this young woman. We understand your sorrow, dear friends, who, with all your love and with all your prayers, have been powerless to save her from death; but do not mourn like those who have no hope; know ye that at the grave of Christians there appears the Comforter of all those who are sad, fulfilling His promise: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. V, 5). He comes as He came to the widow at the gate of the city of Nain, and says: "Weep not." He gives His Spirit to our hearts — the Spirit of comfort, of peace, of fortitude. He turns our eyes from the grave to heaven. He sends us His angels to encourage us in our sorrow, to give us strength even though we are wounded to death. "Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three," says the Apostle. These three, indeed, are the three angels of comfort at the grave of the Christian.

1. The first angel of comfort is the faith, which is stronger

than grief. A hard road we must travel in our pilgrimage on earth to reach our heavenly home, a road beset with thorns. The path is marked by tears, the poor heart will often sigh under the burden. Each day has its troubles. Often, indeed, the Lord will increase the burden until we think our grief must crush us. But our faith, the Christian faith, is stronger than earthly grief. Indeed, what else can keep us from despair, when the burden is heavy, but our faith in the kindness of God; what else can sustain us in the dark ways of life, but faith in God's wisdom? To enter into the kingdom of heaven, we have to pass through many adversities; but while God's purpose is often hidden to us, we know that His ways are always for the best. If the heart cries in its anguish: "Why, Oh Lord, must this be?" faith will answer: "For thy salvation." All things will serve for the best for those who love God, and this will become manifest in time to come, when faith will change into seeing.

2. A second angel of comfort is love, which is stronger than death. We cannot deny the fact that the tears shed at the graves of those dear to our hearts are on our own account rather than for the deceased. Why should we bewail them? because they have departed from a life which at best means toil and hardship? We mourn because we have to walk alone. But love is not selfish; it is glad that the departed has drawn the better lot, and yet remains united with us. Love willingly gives up the bride to the heavenly Bridegroom, knowing that she is happier in heaven than here below. Love extends beyond the grave, the memory of our dead is hallowed; we have one more blessed one in heaven, to draw our hearts heavenwards. For the dead in the Lord are not lost to us; thus are we consoled by the angel of —

3. Hope, which is stronger than any loss. May hope be your companion on the way from this grave, and all through

life, until you become reunited with her whom you consider now lost through death! Death in the Lord is not a loss; it is merely temporary parting, and the happiness of reuniting will be a part of the future heavenly bliss. How far off this reunion is, how near it is, who knows? He alone knows, who is numbering our days, and who will often gather us up speedily when least we expect it. Your heart should rejoice in the hope of meeting again; this hope has a firm foundation, as the rock upon which it is built is our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, what belongs to the earth let it return unto the earth, but the transfigured soul shall draw up our hearts in faith, in love, and in hope, to heaven, where she is abiding now, united with Christ, in everlasting glory. Let us now pray.

LXXXV

BURIALS OF PERSONS OF ADVANCED AGE

I

Let peace come, let him rest in his bed that hath walked in his uprightness (Isa. LVII, 2).

A comforting promise is contained in these prophetical words for all those who walk in this life the path of righteousness. A beautiful inheritance and a great reward are in store for them. "Let peace come, let him rest in his bed that hath walked in his uprightness." This promise will be fulfilled, and it has been fulfilled in this dear, departed mother and widow, whose earthly remains are before us. She belonged to those who have walked in their uprightness, and who strayed not to the way of evil and of perdition. In her long life, beginning with the days of her youth, in her married life, and in her widowhood, we never knew her otherwise than walking the path of righteousness, in the fear of God. She fulfilled conscientiously and faithfully all her duties, all proper demands of vocation and life. In her home life she distinguished herself by that true love that is ever ready to bring sacrifices: sincere and honest, simple and modest, she was very industrious and untiring in the care for her family. The blessed task of motherly love she performed most conscientiously for her children. She was for them a genuine model of virtue, ever ready with advice and help, ever near to them with pious prayers. Her labours were not in vain. She reaped even here a beautiful reward and blessing, for her children were very fond of her, grateful and loyal. For their sake, to care further for them, she would have wished to stay

longer with them. And the survivors had no fonder wish than to keep their dear mother in their midst and to wait upon her lovingly. But the Lord willed differently. He had set the limit to her life; the hour of parting came and of tears. The mother's place is vacant in the *home*, but she has an enduring place in the *hearts* of her grateful children, who will never forget her.

Our departed sister was a good Christian. We numbered her among the most zealous attendants at divine service, and she fortified her soul frequently by partaking, at the holy table of the Lord, of the Bread of Life. To her neighbours she was kind and obliging. To the poor and needy she was merciful and charitable. God the All-merciful has blessed the work of her hands and of her efforts; He guarded and protected her in danger and temptation; He granted her good health for a great many years, and He has taken her from this life only after giving her the time to receive the holy rites.

Now, having walked in her uprightness, peace has come and she has found rest. The merciful God, so we may hope, has received her in the mansions of everlasting peace, to let her partake of the magnificent goods of His house. This comfort the survivors may take to heart, with hope they may look forward to a reunion, but they should endeavour to make sure of the reunion by doing good works, that they may surely meet again the dear and beloved ones who have preceded them into eternity.

Remember, peace and eternal rest will be given only to those "walking in their uprightness," to those who avoid sin, exercise righteousness, fulfil faithfully their duties, who submit to God's will in everything, and who live and die in His love. May God grant us His grace for this, and may He give eternal peace to the soul of our departed sister! Let us pray.

LXXXVI

BURIALS OF PERSONS OF ADVANCED AGE

II

And the Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness and deliver thy bones (Isa. LVIII, 11).

These words of the Prophet, which came to my mind when I looked upon our sister in her death, may also serve for a farewell to her in this hour: "And the Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness and deliver thy bones."

It is that rest that cannot be found on earth, the rest in store for those who have waged the war of life in the name of the true and merciful God, and who have proved true unto death. It is the brightness with which God, the Source of all light and of all grace, will fill the soul who in this life, believing in her Redeemer, has asked for truth and justice. It is that delivery by which man, having with the grace of Christ passed through the sufferings, struggles, trials of life, will be taken into another life, where "death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow" (Apoc. XXI, 4).

And the way to this rest, to this brightness, to this delivery by God, leads through the dark gate of death. Ours is a body of death, and the roads in life, divergent though they may be in other respects, all meet in the corruption of the grave. Death puts an end to all sorrows and pleasures, to all human greatness and lowliness, to all hopes and endeavours of the world. According to God's decree, death will sometimes take vigorous youth, again an aged man, now a

rich man, then a poor man, but death will surely come wherever a human being breathes.

Thus there arrived also for this deceased the hour ordained by the Lord. Her life was rich in events, both sad and joyful, and after a life of many years she has now reached the end of her earthly pilgrimage.

It is true, God granted her a full measure of life, such as is given to but few people. It is true, also, that the debilities of old age gave warning of death, yet to see a human being alive and well in the morning, and then to find her in the evening in the shadow of death, is both a shock and a warning to us.

She received on the threshold of eternity her Divine Lord in the Holy Sacrament, as had been her joy in her days of good health. She had never failed to offer her life to Him who had sacrificed His life for her and all mankind. "And the Lord give thee rest for ever and fill thy soul with brightness and deliver thy bones."

She has finished, as we must finish, to-day or to-morrow, sooner or later. Our days, too, are fleeting; every step onward is a step toward the grave.

And is there nothing enduring in this world, nothing lasting? Indeed, there is one thing that we have within reach, that we can build upon, as upon a rock. It is God, and His eternal verities; it is virtue and its everlasting value; it is the humble and practical belief in the Redeemer — a belief which in life will sanctify our thinking and choosing, our doing and suffering, and which will brighten the hour of our death with hope and confidence in the Lord.

Oh Lord, our God, in whom we should live and die! Thou hast assured us through thy Prophet: "Mountains shall be moved and the hills shall tremble: but My mercy shall not depart from thee, and the covenant of My peace shall not be

moved" (Isa. LIV, 10). Receive, we pray Thee, the soul of this Thy servant; let her enter upon the inheritance of the covenant of peace, which Christ has made for us, and which in Him we have made with Thee. And when there will come our own last hour, then have mercy on us, too, and let us die a holy death, whereof it is written: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord" (Apoc. XIV, 13). AMEN.

LXXXVII

BURIALS OF PERSONS OF ADVANCED AGE

III

Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them (Apoc. XIV, 13).

These are words which the Voice from heaven revealed to St. John and impressed upon his heart. Happy the dead upon whose grave can be laid these words as a last and fitting gift! Happy the mourners to whom we can say these words as a sweet consolation for the heart! Alas, these words cannot be applied to everyone who is buried. But wherever we may rightfully apply them, how hopefully may we stand at those graves! Thanks be to God, of the pilgrim at whose grave we now stand I know no greater praise than: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them."

Our deceased friend truly died in the Lord. Blessed are those who have learned the art of dying! Educated by God-fearing parents, he led a God-fearing life. He was a faithful and good Christian; God's commandments were the laws of his life, God's Will his pleasure, God's peace his most precious gem, God's grace his treasure of life. To pray, to attend the divine service, to hear the Holy Word and meditate upon it, to receive the holy Sacraments — this was his joy and comfort. Not having a helpmate at his side, he bestowed his love upon the poor and needy, and never failed to give and

to do good. When old age and infirmity told upon him, and he could no longer attend church, he spent the day in prayer and charitable work and in the preparation for death; and death at last called him, but not until he had for a last time devoutly received the holy Sacraments.

When a life like this has ended, when a pilgrim like this has departed from the world, we cannot help saying: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them."

The works that follow him are works of penance, of self-denial, of patience, of charity, all the good works he has done for the glory of God. These works accompanied him to the judgment seat of God, who rewards everyone according to his works, and we may hope that they have earned him a gracious judgment and the inheritance of the Saints.

We cannot know, my friends, whether or not we are destined to reach an old age, as did the deceased; nor do we know whether or not we shall have the time and the grace to prepare for a good death; but one thing we do know: everyone will be rewarded according to his works. Oh, let us provide, therefore, in time, lest we may appear empty-handed before the judgment seat of God, lest we be cast out, as unprofitable servants, into the exterior darkness, where there "shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Let us be dead to sin, and try to become alive in good works, for by our works we shall be judged. It is only the good labourer who gets the reward, whereas the slothful servant will be condemned. Hence, I say with the Apostle: "In doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Let us pray for the deceased.

LXXXVIII

BURIALS OF PERSONS OF ADVANCED AGE

IV

The number of the days of men at the most are a hundred years: as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed: and as a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to eternity (Ecclus. XVIII, 8).

Every death, every grave, is a warning to us that there is nothing enduring on earth, that everything is transient and in vain. Fleeting and passing is the time. One minute follows the other, one hour hastens the other, day upon day and year after year go, until, unexpectedly and unawares, we are standing at the end of life. Our departed brother has reached a high age, yet he said on his death-bed that his life seemed to him a short one and rapidly gone. This will happen to everyone of us. Even he who lives eighty, ninety, even a hundred years or more, will have to confess at the end that his long life seems like a brief dream. No matter how long a man may walk on earth, at the end he will admit the truth of the words of Holy Writ: "The number of the days of men at the most are a hundred years: as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed: and as a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to eternity." He will confess with the Psalmist: "Our years shall be considered as a spider: the days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong, they be fourscore years: and what is more of them is labour and sorrow. For mildness is come upon us and we shall be corrected" (Ps. LXXXIX, 10).

No matter how long we live, at the end we shall say with

Job: "For we are but of yesterday and are ignorant that our days upon earth are but a shadow."

But time is not the only thing that is fleeting, and quick to pass away; so does everything worldly that we have acquired in the course of our life. Our departed brother did not lack earthly possessions; he was in comfortable circumstances, and was able to enjoy things which many others have to forego. Yet what did it profit him? He had to leave everything behind; all he can take with him into his grave are the four boards of his coffin and his shroud.

Oh, let us take this to heart, dear friends! Let no one build upon fleeting time; for no one knows whether even the tomorrow will belong to him, whether he will be able to make use of the day for penitence and reform, for doing good and working out his salvation. "There is but one step between us and death" (1. Kings XX, 3). "Man knoweth not his own end: but as fishes are caught with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them" (Eccl. IX, 12). Hence, St. Paul's urgent exhortation: "See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly: not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Employ your time, not to gather goods that are idle and perishable, which you will have to leave behind you in death, not to enjoy the pleasures that in the end change into bitterness, but employ the time to become rich in virtue and good deeds, which alone possess a lasting value for eternity, and which alone merit everlasting reward. "Love not the world," says St. John, "nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world. And

the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof; but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever" (John II, 15, 17). He who does the Will of God and dies in the love of God, will die a blessed death, and he shall not be disappointed in his hope of an eternal blessedness. This is testified by St. John: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13). "In doing good, let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing" (Gal. VI, 9). Let us now pray for the deceased, that the Lord may let him partake of the heavenly harvest.

LXXXIX

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS, WIDOWERS, AND WIDOWS

I

Alas, I am a widow woman, for my husband is dead (2. Kings XIV, 5).

"Once a woman of Thecua was come into the king, she fell before him upon the ground and worshipped, and said: 'Save me, Oh king!' And the king said to her: 'What is the matter with thee?' She answered: 'Alas, I am a widow woman: for my husband is dead.'" We behold, dear brethren, a sad event in this funeral. We have among us one who complains: "Alas, I am a widow woman; for my husband is dead." It is not long since he who is now departed and she who is now mourning him, joined hands at the altar of the Lord in the true and indissoluble union of hands and hearts. And now the bond is severed; death has parted them. The happiness of life is shattered, gone is the joy of life; the heart is crushed by sorrow. Yet, what great comfort for us to know that he died a good Christian death, just as he lived a good Christian life! He received the holy Sacraments repeatedly, endured his sufferings with patience, and breathed his last resigned to God's holy Will. Where are we to seek comfort! Alone in Him, who said: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."

A precious word, indeed, and a magnificent promise! The best that can be offered to the widow in her affliction. The Lord is with her; His fatherly heart is bent towards her, His

hand is over her, His grace is with her, His protection is hers, and His help. He has led her upon the way of the Cross, but He will also give her the strength to walk it in patience and resignation. He has filled her soul with sorrow, but He will soothe the wound with the oil of His consolation. Hence, let her mind the words, and let us do so with her: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee," and in our trust in the Lord we shall proceed on our way with hope and courage. Hence, let her, and let us, build upon this word, as upon a rock, and whenever the storms of life rage around us, let us look up to Him who has promised us: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."

Hence, be calm in sorrow, be strong and hopeful, Oh Christian heart! Cling to the Almighty, who holds all things in His hand; to the Eternal, whose years have no end; to the Omnipresent, who is with us to the end of the world; to the All-merciful, who will give to those who ask; to the All-wise, who never yet has erred. Whatever may befall us, whatever hardship may strike us, His words: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee," will support us, fortify and comfort us. We may hope with good reason that the Lord was a merciful Judge to our departed brother and received him into His kingdom. Let us pray.

XC

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

II

(Death in Childbirth)

Fear not, for I am with thee, for I am thy God: I have strengthened thee and have helped thee, and the right hand of My just one has upheld thee (Isa. XLI, 10).

"A woman when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but when she has brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John XVI, 21).

While our departed sister went through the anguish, it was, alas, not given to her to partake in the joy of which these words from Holy Scripture speak. Hardly had the young life been born into the world, when it was ordained for the mother to depart therefrom. But since she was fully prepared for a good death, we may hope that she is now partaking of the better joys of heaven. Yet, however happy her lot, there is a husband mourning his dutiful wife, children are deprived of a dear, faithful mother, the house has lost its beloved mistress, and the bereaved ask in the desolation of the soul: "Oh Lord, why hast Thou done this?" And the Lord replies in the sanctity of His word: "Fear not, for I am with thee, for I am thy God: I have strengthened thee, and have helped thee, and the right hand of My just one has upheld thee."

This is the word of a Father to His children. It must impart steadfastness to the heart, and comfort and fortitude to the soul. It is not a vain promise, not an empty pledge; it is truth, a

real gift of grace and life. For the Lord gives and does whatever He promises to give and to do: of this we are assured by Holy Writ: "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor as the Son of man, that he should be changed. Hath he said then, and will not do? hath he spoken and will he not fulfil?" (Num. XXIII, 19). "And thou shalt know that the Lord thy God, he is a strong and faithful God, keeping mercy to them that love him and keep his commandments" (Deut. VII, 9).

Hence, my friends, dismiss the thoughts that bring gloom and sorrow to the heart. "I am with thee," in the days of distress and loneliness. "I am with thy body and thy soul, with thy work and thy ways. I keep a watchful eye on thee, day and night. Let thy faith not be confounded." "I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, and help thee, and the right hand of My justice will uphold thee." Let His word and His grace be sufficient unto you: "Blessed is he who hath God for his helper," who made heaven and earth and all things that are in them; who keepeth truth for ever" (Ps. CXLV, 5–7).

Let us not be wanting, therefore, in confidence in God's fatherly kindness, but let us also not forget that He gives His graces only to those who love Him and keep His commandments. Let us submit in humility to His holy Will, let us love Him and keep His commandments, so that we also may get there, where, so we hope, she is abiding in safety, and where she is awaiting the joyous reunion with her beloved ones and with us all. Since, however, no one can enter heaven with even the least remnant of our human shortcomings, let us pray.

XCI

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

III

In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world (John XVI, 33).

My dear husband and children, you have suffered, according to human judgment, a great and irreparable loss. Mutual love and faithfulness, and God's blessing upon your temporal affairs, had made of your house a home of peace and happiness. Now, suddenly the horizon of your life has become dark, and is clouded with anguish and mourning. Great is your grief, and we are desirous to speak some words that will comfort you. And for such words of true comfort we must go to the Scriptures, and one of the sayings of our Lord which seems to apply well in this case is: "In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world."

These words were spoken by One who suffered more and had more distress than any man on earth, by our divine Lord and Master, our Model and Example, our Mediator and Advocate with the Father, our Helper and Saviour Jesus Christ. "In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world." Indeed, He has overcome the world, through the virtue of obedience to the Father, through His love for men. He performed His task until He could exclaim: "It is consummated." Through His bitter passion and death He ascended to glory, and has taken His place on the right hand of the Father, crowned with honour as the great Conquerer of sin and the world, of death and the grave.

And He overcame the world for *all* mankind, so that they who belong to Him need fear no more, as His victory is our victory also.

No fear of distress, for He is with us, with His grace and strength to comfort us in our suffering. No fear of death, because those who believe in Him may say with the Apostle: "Christ is my life, to die is my gain." No fear of the hereafter, for He has gone to the Father's house, where there are many mansions, to prepare a place for us.

Come, then, follow Him! His suffering is ended; so will yours end in Him and through Him. He will lend us His hand, so that we too may conquer, through His strength, all adversity and distress of the world.

"In the world you shall have distress: but have confidence, I have overcome the world." You are in distress, my friends; great sorrow weighs upon your mind, and, I fear, will weigh upon your mind for some time to come. You have been thrown into profound grief, from which to rise will not be done so readily. A precious boon of life has been taken from you, but, in the anguish of your souls, turn to Him, who is the Light of the world, who will refresh all those who are worried and burdened; look up to Him, who is with us all days even unto the end of the world. Bear the burden He imposes upon you with resignation and patience.

If you persevere in patience, and walk in the steps of the Saviour, then His peace will be with you and His word will be fulfilled: "Now all chastisement, for the present indeed, seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow: but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice" (Heb. XII, 11). Let us pray for the departed, that this fruit of justice may be her portion.

XCII

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

IV

I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work (John IX, 4).

Thus said our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and it is this thought which guided Him in His great and sublime task. We see Him untiring in the service of the Father, who had sent Him; we see Him in the ardour of His mission, to seek and save that which was lost. His earthly pilgrimage was a journey full of blessings. God's will was His aim, God's work His daily task, God's pleasure His joy, the glory of God His endeavour. "I must work the works of Him, that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no one can work."

The life and endeavour of the divine Lord was taken by our dear, deceased brother for the model which he tried to imitate. He was an industrious man, yet the main object of his labours was not to amass temporal goods, but, rather, to keep God's law and the commandments. What he earned through the blessing of the Lord in his industry and thrift, did not serve him for luxuries of life, but he used it for the education and training of his children. He was a good father and husband, fulfilling all his duties most faithfully. No less conscientious was he in his duties to his religion, mindful of the Saviour's word: "For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. XVI, 26). This was the keynote of his whole life. "I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

And night did come! He prepared for his death by repeat-

edly receiving the holy Sacraments, and he bore the sufferings of his sickness in devout resignation, until his eyes closed, and night came, "when no man can work." Night it is in his coffin, it is night in the grave, it is dark like night in your mourning hearts, yet a heavenly brightness is surrounding his immortal soul, which, we may hope, has entered everlasting glory. Eternal love has prepared a place for him in the Father's house, where there are many mansions, where he is now rejoicing in his God and in his Saviour. His soul is extolling the Lord for all the graces and benefits which God so graciously bestowed upon him during his earthly life, and he is praying for you, my friends, from whom he had to part so prematurely.

Dear brethren, look up to the heights of heaven, and remember that by death we do not lose those who are dear to us, they only go ahead of us. It is not a parting for ever, only a temporary absence. But lest your hope of a happy reunion be doomed to disappointment, take the words of the Saviour for your rule of life: "I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." You know your work, it is summarized in the words of Holy Writ: "Turn away from evil and do good" (Ps. XXXIII, 15). The evil will lead you to perdition, but doing good will earn you everlasting bliss.

Let us then work the good work whilst it is day, and before the night cometh, when no man can work. *When* for us this night of death is to come, when all work for salvation ceases, we know not: "man knoweth not his own end." Hence, do not postpone from one day to another the preparation for a good death: the night may *suddenly* come when no man can work. "Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come," and, "Blessed is that servant, whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find so doing" (Matt. XXIV, 44, 46). Now let us pray.

XCIII

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

V

Behold, I die, and God will be with you (Gen. XLVIII, 21).

Dear friends, while the sight of death and the grave will always incline man to serious thought, there are cases when the bitterness of death becomes especially apparent, when we feel the sorrow of parting more than ever. Such is the present case. Before us are the earthly remains of one who was a model wife to her husband, who was the loving mother of small children, and as yet they have hardly a full conception of the enormity of their loss. This is indeed a sad and sorrowful case, and we are sincerely desirous to offer a word of comfort. But where else can we look for comfort in such a sad case than in the Holy Scriptures, that inexhaustible and true source of all consolation? And there we find it, in the words of Jacob, who, when expiring, said to his children: "Behold, I die, and God will be with you."

While these words may not remove the bitterness of death nor the sorrow of parting, they do tell us through whom we may overcome death and parting.

1. "Behold, I die," said Jacob to his sons, as he was about to depart from this world. "Behold, I die," so might have said our departed sister. She desired to live longer, for the sake of her husband and of her beloved children. But God's ways are not our ways. In vain were all wishes and prayers for her recovery. The Lord had decreed the hour, and what God does is for the best. For, as the Prophet says: "He thinks only thoughts of peace towards us and not of affliction,

to give us an end and patience" (Jer. XXIX, 11). God often demands sacrifice from those He loves. Of Abraham He demanded an only son, Isaac, and to this very day He comes to demand the sacrifice of those near and dear to us. It is done to direct our thoughts to heaven, to Him who has power over life and death.

Often it is difficult for man to become reconciled to such visitations of Providence. Many a tear is shed when the words are spoken, "Behold, I die." Yet these words are full of consolation for the true Christian, for through death he is delivered from all hardship, toil, and trouble of this earth, from all suffering. This must be a comfort for the survivors; it must induce them to praise God even in such a great and crushing loss. They must leave their own feeling out of consideration and think solely of the deceased, of whom a Voice from heaven said, as revealed by St. John: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works will follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13).

Let it be your thought, too, my friends, that your dear wife, your dear mother, died in the Lord, in whom she confided and whom she endeavoured to imitate in patient suffering. This hope is the more justified, as she had prepared earnestly for a good death by devoutly receiving the holy Sacraments. Happy she, to have passed through death to eternal life!

2. True, if you consider your great loss, you have much reason to mourn. But be consoled by Jacob's farewell: "God will be with you." The Lord will not leave nor forsake you; He will protect you, for He has said: "Mountains shall be moved and the hills shall tremble: but My mercy shall not depart from thee, and the covenant of My peace shall not be moved: said the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. LIV, 10).

He will lead and guide you, true to His name, because He is called "Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the World to Come, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. IX, 6). He will be gracious to you, for the sake of His love; for "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things?" (Rom. VIII, 32). As a father takes pity on his children, so does the Lord take pity on them that fear Him. He is the Father of all His children. His fatherly Heart knows all thy needs. His fatherly Eye will watch over thee and thy house. His fatherly hands will never fail to give thee true help. He will hear thy supplications, and the prayer of thy children, and give thee aid, and mercy, and comfort.

Hence, take courage, bring up thy children in the fear and discipline of the Lord, raise them in the faith, in hope and charity, and never cease to prepare for the eternal life. Be faithful in preparing for thy own end, so that, when the Lord cometh and calleth thee to meet thy wife in the life beyond, thou wilt be found worthy to enter into the joy of the Lord.

My dear friends, let us all prepare for our last hour; let us, like the wise virgins, be ready to meet the Bridegroom when He cometh. "Remember, that death is not slow, Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near; work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Ecclus. XIV, 12). Now let us pray for the deceased, that the Lord may receive her into His kingdom.

XCIV

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

VI

He hath done all things well (MARK VII, 37).

DEAR friends, our deepest sympathy goes out to the bereaved on this sad occasion, and we join them in supplicating God: Be thou, Oh Lord, their comfort and hope, their aid and succour. Comfort their anxious hearts in this great affliction, gird them with strength, that they may confess in the faith, and with submission to Thy holy will: "The Lord hath done all things well."

Yes, the Lord does all things well. The dear departed is relieved of all burdens, and is reaping now, so we may hope, the reward for her faithfulness on earth. "The Lord hath done all things well": He has removed this pious mother, after her suffering, to peace and everlasting glory.

With regard to yourselves, my friends, let me remind you of the words of the Psalmist: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him: and he will do it" (Ps. XXXVI, 5). The God of all love will not forsake you. Trust in His promise: "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed: but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be moved" (Isa. LIV. 10). You have the satisfaction of knowing that you did faithfully and loyally everything for her that dutiful and loving children can and should do for their mother: you have the consoling hope, that after her many trials and sufferings she is now received into the joy of the Lord: you have, further-

more, the reassuring certainty that the gracious and merciful God will not cease in His care for you. Although sorrow has now fallen to your lot, you may be confident that the Lord will fulfil in you His promise: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee." Build upon this promise, and cling to this word. Honour the memory of your dear mother, by following in her steps, by faithfully doing your duties, and by walking before the Lord in sincere piety. Pray for your departed parents, that they may see the glory of God. Especially do I exhort and ask the older of you, to watch over your younger brothers and sisters, to care for them, to direct them by word and example to the path of righteousness. Then the Lord will not take away His blessing from you, and your sorrow will change into gladness.

Above all, take to heart the exhortation: "Brethren, be of one mind, have peace, and the God of peace and of love shall be with you" (2. Cor. XIII, 11). Let love and harmony soothe your sorrow, let union gird you with the strength to bear the burdens imposed upon you by God. Form this resolution here, at the grave of your dear mother, and raise your heart in prayer and gratitude to Him, who, so we hope, has brought this pilgrim, weary from the burden of her days on earth, to the heavenly home. Let us pray.

XCV

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

VII

Peace be to you (John XX, 19).

My dear friends, again it has come to pass that robust health has quickly given way to disease and death. Plunged into deep grief is this family, and the grief is the deeper because death was not expected so soon in a life so full of vigour and energy. The deceased was a true man; he enjoyed both respect and confidence. He pursued his objects in life with rare skill and perseverance. Yet he never became neglectful in his religious duties; he regularly attended church and received the holy Sacraments, and, ably assisted by his devoted wife, he insisted in their home upon Christian discipline and conduct, for he recognized that the sterling virtue, which is victorious in the struggle of life and steadfast in temptation, is a fruit that ripens only on the soil of a firm belief and in the fear of God. For his wife and children he had the tenderest love. His most ardent wish, and the aim of all his efforts in business, were to make, with God's help and blessing, their life care-free and happy, and the Lord has graciously made him thrive and prosper. It is easy to understand, therefore, the grief of his people, and where can they look for consolation but to Him, who has left us His comfort in the words: "Peace be with you"?

It was with this greeting of peace that He, on the day of the Resurrection, suddenly stood in the midst of His disciples. "Peace be with you!" Be of good cheer, dismiss the thoughts

of fear and anxiety. You, too, my friends, are included in this greeting of the Lord. They are not idle words. The Prince of Peace addresses them to you.

Check your sadness; fear not! This death is not a punishment, though it is a trial. While his heart has ceased to beat, and his protection is no more for you, the Heart of the Lord is gracious to you and will remain so, His love shall protect you throughout life. He will not leave you; you will experience His guidance and receive His help. His blessing will dwell with you. "Peace be to you!"

Pray, then, that the divine Prince of Peace may come amongst you, and give you the peace that the world can neither give nor take away. In Him you will find the strength to bear this distress with patience and in confidence. And if you steadily walk the path of the commandments, then this peace will abide with you. For it is written: "Much peace have they that love thy law" (Ps. CXVIII, 165).

"Peace be to you!" Lord, give us Thy peace! Let us partake of Thy grace and of Thy mercy, that we may become and remain Thy true children, that we may pass our life in Thy service, and be received finally into Thy eternal kingdom of glory!

Peace be to you, and peace be also to the deceased! Let him, Oh Lord, find peace with Thee, Thou who art the God of peace. Receive him into Thy kingdom, and grant him, in consideration of his faithful stewardship and of his suffering, the joy and glory of heaven. Let us pray.

XCVI

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

VIII

Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed (Job XIV, 5).

The days of man are subject to God's dispensation. On His Will depend their beginning, their continuance, their end. "The days of men are short," says pious Job, "and the number of his months is with thee: thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed."

In these words, my friends, there is a rich source of consolation, whenever a dear member of a family has died, when our hearts are filled with sorrow. God, in His wisdom, justice, and kindness, has decreed this death. He has appointed the hour of all of us, according to laws the aim of which is our true welfare. Whether we shall die soon or late, sudden or after sickness, at home or abroad — all these things and their circumstances are foreseen by God, our kind Father. He has appointed everything for our best, and for the best for those dear to us. This thought should moderate our grief for the dear departed, but it should also induce in us a wise disposition of our own life.

Since God ordains our fate, far be it from us to argue with Him! Would it not be ingratitude towards our greatest Benefactor to doubt His love for us, to object to His ways, to try and dictate to Him what means to adopt for our good? Far from us be such ingratitude! "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it." Let us leave it

to His wisdom to decide what is good for us, let us leave it to His love what He will send us, let us leave it to His power what to decree, and, whether it be joy or sorrow, health or sickness, life or death, let us accept it willingly and gratefully; for "we know that to them who love God all things work together unto good" (Rom. VIII, 28).

Since God ordains our fate, it is our duty to manifest our homage in pious obedience. Were we the masters of our days of life, then we might make use of them as we please: then the rich man might rightfully say: "My money shall provide for me all the joys and pleasures of the world;" the glutton might say: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die" (1. Cor. XV, 32), and so on. But such is not the case; we are in God's hand with all we are and own. "For none of us liveth to himself: and no man dieth to himself," says the Apostle; "for whether we live, we live unto the Lord: or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. XIV, 7, 8). Therefore we must live for the glory of God, for He has made us. "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is all man" (Eccl. XII, 13). Aye, He shall be our life, we will keep His commandments, we will endeavour to deserve His grace all our days, to the moment of our death.

When death will happen, no one knows but God, but we *do* know that once we shall reap the fruit of our sowing in this life, that everybody will be judged according to his works. "For what things a man shall sow," says the Apostle, "those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting" (Gal. VI, 8). It means that he who gives way to his passions and commits deeds of sin shall reap death and the ruin of eternal damnation; but they who, animated by the Holy Ghost, conform to His

direction and are doing good, they shall enter the joy of the Lord.

Since, then, the hour of our death is known to God alone, since, moreover, our fate in eternity depends on the fact whether our death be good or evil, should we not at all times be intent on preparing for a good death? We know what will happen if death were to carry us off in sin. "When the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more," says Holy Writ (Prov. XI, 7). The Lord, the just Judge, will say: "And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. XXV, 30).

Our departed brother had the privilege to prepare for death by receiving the holy Sacraments. Whether this grace will be our part also, we do not know. Hence, dear friends, inasmuch as the Lord alone ordains our fate, inasmuch as joy and sorrow, life and death, are coming from His hand, let us submit to His dispensation in humility, and let us say, in happy days and in adversities, "The Lord hath done all things well." Let us avoid sin so as to escape an evil death; let us do good and we shall not appear empty-handed before the Judgment. Let us live so that we may hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. XXV, 21). Let us pray for the deceased.

XCVII

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

IX

For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come (Heb. XIII, 14).

Dear friends, there are heavy trials in this life, and an instance of them is the occasion of our gathering here. In such trials the heart is inclined to lament bitterly, forgetting that everything is ordained and directed for our best by God's holy Wisdom. Hence, we must not so much consider the earthly life which the deceased has left, but the eternal life which he has begun. Our life on earth would be truly disconsolate if we had no other life to expect. Then we might well despair, if, after much hardship and struggle, death comes at the very moment when we just begin to taste the sweetness of life, when our experience has gained for us wisdom and prudence. If, however, we remember the true object of life and the life hereafter, we understand, and we confess: "The Lord has done all things well!" Since it is the part of wisdom and prudence to bear always in mind the ultimate object of our life, we must never forget the words of the Apostle: "We have not here an everlasting city, but we seek one to come."

1. Indeed, everything we see here indicates that we have no lasting place here. Everything surrounding us reminds us that earthly things are transitory, and suggests forcibly the truth: "We have not here a lasting city." "Man born of woman," says Job (XIV, 1, 2), "living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow and never continueth

in the same state." You need but glance around you. So many of our kin, friends, and neighbours are gone, and resting in their grave; and we know that their fate will be ours. Not only does God's wisdom hold up to our eyes these instances of transientness to remind us of our frailty, He warns us thereof also by the changes in our own body. We were once young and full of vigour, but as age advances, the vigour is going. We are now hale and hearty, but we are often attacked by some illness or other, as a forceful reminder how unsafe our earthly mansion is. Another reminder of the great change to be brought about by death is given us by the vicissitudes of this life. Losing now this part, now that, of our possessions, it is a warning that we cannot count upon anything in this life with certainty, that ultimately we shall in death lose everything temporal.

But has not God done wisely for us? The truth of our death is bound to make us cautious. "In all thy works remember thy last end," says Holy Writ, "and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. VII, 40). This truth will teach us not to set our heart too much on earthly things, not to make idols of them. "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world," warns St. John. "If any man loveth the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever" (John II, 15–17). This truth is bound to comfort us in suffering and distress: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation," says St. Paul, "worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2. Cor. IV, 17). Hence, however long our adversities in this life may last, eventually they will pass away, and an everlasting and im-

perishable reward will be given to us if we have been faithful in the love and service of God. Hence, let us not ask, why is this life on earth so burdensome, so full of suffering, so short? but let us cling to the truth that we have here no everlasting city, but that we shall receive our share of happiness and bliss in the hereafter.

2. This should urge us to seek the lasting city, namely, to prepare for the other life. Man likes not to think of death and eternity. He is too fond of this life to wish for its end. If his lot on earth were nothing but happiness, he would even more love this life, and death would appear to him even more dreadful. And who would then ever think of preparing for the hereafter? The Lord has wisely arranged it, that man is not only reminded of the vanity of life, but also that in the course of time he will get weary of life, even hoping for death. In this way God's wisdom not only diminishes the terror of death, but induces man to earnestly think of eternity, and to prepare for it. It is especially in adversity and suffering that he recognizes there is no lasting city for him here, nor enduring happiness, and he sets out to work his salvation. Disease and sickness are God's envoys to man, advising him: "Put thy house in order, for thou shalt die." Not until harassed by trouble and worry, will man usually be stirred out of his indifference, and be induced to meditate upon the condition of his soul, upon his account with God, upon his fate in the hereafter, and he will then be converted to the Lord. The righteous man will be moved by afflictions to persevere in good, lest he forfeit the crown of life everlasting.

Our departed brother was ever mindful of the word of the Apostle: "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." He prepared for a good death by a Christian life and by receiving the holy Sacraments. Hence, we may hope that he has received the crown of glory. However, let us pray.

XCVIII

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

X

It is appointed unto men once to die (Heb. IX, 27).

What an immense power death has over mankind! How numerous are his victims! What abundance of sadness is caused by death! Crushing are the blows, and grievous the losses, inflicted by death. Death spares not rank, age, nor condition. The mighty are helpless against its power: all the possessions of a rich man will not buy for him immunity from death; the infant in the cradle, the youth in his bloom, the man in the prime of life — they all fall a prey to death as readily as the aged. Death forces its entrance into all homes, knocking at the mansion of the rich and at the hut of the poor, and wherever death enters there are sorrows and tears, there are wailing and misery. But few see in death a saving angel, who comes to change sadness into joy, to put an end to frailty and debility, to misery and anxiety: most men look upon death as a horror, changing joy into sorrow; for here death cuts asunder a happy union, there children become orphans: it deprives parents of sons and daughters: it parts brothers and sisters, friends and comrades.

This cruel visitor has now entered the circle of your family, my dear friends. In this instance, too, death has triumphed over faithful love and care, over medical skill, and now we are about to consign these earthly remains to the earth. We do it with sadness, and moved by the deepest sympathy for the bereft. But we do it as is befitting Christians, who are pos-

sessed of the comfort, the hope, and the promises contained in the gospel: we do it resigned to God's holy Will, and in our hope in Him who has said: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live" (John XXV, 11).

In the light of the gospel of Christ, we know that death is not annihilation, but rather our transition to a better and more perfect life; we know the happy unions established here in the name of the Lord, and sanctified through the love for Him, are by death not for ever torn asunder, but only parted for a short period, to be reëstablished in the hereafter for all eternity. We know that He who woundeth also healeth. In this life there is weeping, but in the life beyond the tears will be wiped away of those who have lived in Christ and who died in the Lord. Here we hear lamentations; but for the true confessors of Christ all plaint will cease in the hereafter.

Shall we begrudge, then, our dear ones, who have died a blessed death, their rest, their peace, and their bliss, to which they are introduced by death? By a good death they can only gain, no matter what temporal goods they had here. In heaven there are the eternal treasures for good Christians; there is the perfect happiness, the enjoyment of beatitude in the communion with God. On earth there are unrest, worry, suffering, but none of these things will touch those that in heaven enjoy eternal happiness.

Let us, therefore, change our plaint into gratitude, our grief into cheerful hope, whenever we are standing at the grave of a Christian, of whom we can say: "He has fought a good fight, he has kept the faith, he has finished his course in the peace of God. For him to die is gain; and the Lord will render to him the crown of justice and of life eternal." And while we are comforted in our grief by the thought of the crown of life, which will be given to those who have died

in the love of God, let us now firmly resolve to care conscientiously for our own immortal soul: let us aim at becoming rich in good works, so that we may be prepared for our last hour, whether it come soon or late, and that we may confide in the promise: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (Apoc. XIV, 13).

Most gracious and merciful God, let this occasion of mourning become a blessing for us in time and eternity! Let our departed brother rejoice in Thy sight! Give him Thy peace, and fill with consolation the souls of those who mourn his loss. Let the widow and orphans be commended to Thy care and protection: guide them, and all of us, according to Thy counsel, and finally receive them and us all into Thy kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us pray.

XCIX

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

XI

To thee is the poor man left: thou wilt be a helper to the orphan (Ps. X, 14).

My dear friends, if anything is apt to stir our hearts to deepest sympathy, it is without doubt the sight of orphaned children in tender age, without a guide, adviser, and provider, at an age, indeed, when they need most the direction and the care of loving and loyal hearts. This sad sight is before us here, and our hearts are filled with deepest sympathy. These children have lost both parents, they are left alone in a cold world in which even the experienced and strong find so many difficulties. It is only a few years since they lost their father, and now we are about to consign to the grave the earthly remains of their mother.

In view of her Christian life and of her holy death, we do not doubt that she has been received into the mansions of the Lord. But here are the children, orphaned and forsaken. We ask who will care for them, and we find a comfortimg answer in the gospel. The God of love is and remains the Father of all His children. Since He feeds the birds of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field, how much more will He care for those whom He has created after His image, and whom He has destined for eternal glory! Their mother will pray before His throne, that He may bless the dear little children she had to part from, and He will not close His ear to her supplications. The Lord will move the hearts, that

they will take a loving interest in these orphans. You, my friends, you will surely take an interest in these children, for "Religion, clean and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation and to keep one's self unspotted from this world" (Jas. I, 27). Remember the promise of the Saviour: "Whosoever shall receive such child in my name, receiveth me" (Luke IX, 48). Here, at the grave of the departed mother, pledge yourself to God, to care for these forsaken orphans, and to raise them, by word and example, in the fear of God. May God bless your efforts, may He bless your love and loyalty, and may He let the children, in memory for their pious mother, walk the path of piety and godliness, so that when their own earthly career is at an end they may be reunited with their good parents in joy everlasting.

To Thee, Oh Lord, we commend these orphaned children! Lead and guide them, train them for Thy heaven; let the loss they have suffered, the enormity of which they are not able to grasp, turn into a blessing and a profit for their souls!

As for us, let us keep mindful of our frailty, that we devote ourselves anew to God's service; that we may lead a Christian life, die a blessed death, and inherit in time the life everlasting. Let us pray for the deceased.

C

BURIALS OF MARRIED PERSONS

XII

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. XXII, 32).

We have come, my friends, to bury the earthly remains of our departed brother. We are moved by strongest sympathy for those now deprived of a father, a husband, and provider. The thought, moreover, of having lost such an excellent man from our circle also fills our hearts with sadness. The deceased surely was an excellent man, in the fullest sense of the word. He proved it in all the circumstances of his life. A good and faithful husband, a loving and conscientious father, and one who to his friends was a loyal and honest friend. The community has lost in him an honourable member, intelligent and industrious in his business: the congregation has lost a faithful Christian, who was never afraid to show his religious conviction and who faithfully lived up to it. He appeared frequently at the holy table of the Lord, and prepared for a good death by devoutly receiving the holy Sacraments. He suffered in his sickness with patient resignation to God's holy Will. How, indeed, can we help feeling sad and sorrowful?

Yet, we must not forget to offer to God that humble submission to His holy decree and Will which Christians must practise under all circumstances. The Lord does all things well. For, whatever happens to us on earth happens by the decree of the same God whom Jesus Christ revealed to us as the God of love, whom we call Father, unworthy though we

are. We are not ruled by blind fate, but by a wise and gracious God, who, in all His dispensations, decrees only that which is for our salvation, though His ways are often inscrutable to our short-sightedness.

Our friend was recalled by the gracious Father in Heaven; and, however great our sorrow, we know by the gospel that death is not the end of his existence, not the destruction of his life, it is only the transition to a better life, to the world of glory, which is our true country, and for which we all should aim in our pilgrimage on earth. Hence, from this grave, ready to receive the earthly and corruptible remains of our friend, we raise our eyes to the bright heights of heaven, where he, so we may hope, is rejoicing among the blessed. We console ourselves with the thought: He is with his Lord, who also is our Lord. He has preceded his beloved ones, and they will follow him, sooner or later.

Hence, my friends, do not mourn like those who have no hope, but mourn like Christians, believing in Him who has overcome death, and who has brought us life and immortality. You, my children, remember there is a God in heaven, who will care for you, who will console you, guide you and provide for you, fulfilling in you His promise: "I will not leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."

Honour the memory of the departed and promise right here, to God and to yourselves, to walk in his steps, leading a Christian life, for this is the best way to honour his memory, and worthy of the blessing of the Lord.

Let us all resolve at this grave, to be true disciples and followers of Christ, to keep the faith, to fight a good fight, so that, after having finished our course in the fear of God, we may be deemed worthy to enter into His joy. Let us pray for the deceased.

CI

BURIALS OF PRIESTS

I

Be thou faithful until death: and I will give thee the crown of life (Apoc. II, 10).

This was the message sent by Jesus through St. John to the Bishop of Smyrna. He was a worthy Bishop, guiding his faithful to salvation by teaching and example, indifferent to the slander and ridicule of his enemies. He was very poor and had many troubles, with even more and greater ones in prospect. Hence, Jesus sent him this message to comfort him, and to gird him with strength: "Be thou faithful until death: and I will give thee the crown of life."

This same message was sent by Jesus to this departed member of the ministry. Even at his Baptism he received this message of the Lord: "Be thou faithful"; then, as he grew up, and entered upon his studies, the message was again: "Be thou faithful," make good use of thy time, to become a worthy priest of the Church. Then when, as newly ordained priest, he received his first assignment, again he heard the words: "Be thou faithful," lest thou be condemned while preaching salvation to others.

And this same message is addressed by Jesus to everyone of us: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Death will overcome all of us, sooner or later. "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. IX, 27). No one is certain of his life, not even for one single hour: "there is but one step between me and death," said King David.

To almost all men death comes sooner than they expect, and then all the glory of this world is at an end. The king lays down his crown, the bishop his staff. Even the wealthiest can take to his grave no more than the four boards of his coffin and a shroud. Different is the soul. It takes with it the merits of a faithful, Christian life. The deceased was a dear friend of mine, as he was of yours. A great deal might be said of his zealous work in the vineyard of the Lord, of his personal, sterling qualities, yet his wish was, not to be praised, but to be an instrument in God's hand for the benefit of others. Let us, then, for our edification, and in his honour, contemplate his stanch Christian faith, and let us consider:

1. Of what does the Christian faith consist; and,
2. What is its reward.

1. St. John admonishes us: "Be thou faithful unto death." To be faithful means, to keep our word, our promise. Hence, our Christian faith consists in keeping our promise to adhere to the word of God, to live and to act according to His precepts, to fear God, to love God more than anyone and anything else, and to love the neighbour as one's self, and, doing so, to work out our salvation.

We have all given this promise. We have given it when we were baptized, our sponsors answering in our name. We, again, have given this promise before our first Holy Communion by reaffirming our baptismal vow, and at our Confirmation. Moreover, every time we go to Confession, we promise to reform our life, and not to sin again. And at this very moment, when reminded so forcibly of the vanity of everything temporal, let us renew our promise to cleave faithfully to God and to Jesus Christ, whom He sent for our salvation, and to pursue, first of all, the kingdom of God and His justice.

It is our duty to worship Jesus as the Son of God, to wor-

ship God in the spirit and in truth, to avoid sin, and to keep God's commandments. He who fails to do this is unfaithful, he is faithless; but he who does all this has the true Christian faith, and lives in it. This Christian faith was zealously practised by our departed reverend friend. He confessed Christ as the Son of God, He worshipped God, publicly as well as in the solitude of his room. Jesus said, the world will know His disciples by their love for one another, and was not our friend's heart full of love for man? He was kind, and his tenderness of heart, his modesty, friendliness, and meekness made him popular with everyone; they made him respected and beloved by both priests, and people.

But we — have *we* lived hitherto in the Christian faith? Was *our* belief firm, have *we* been mindful of God always and everywhere? Did we pray to Him, did we fear Him, did we thank Him for the many benefits received? Did we confide in His providence, and have we been resigned when He decreed for us crosses and sufferings? Did we think and say: "The Lord has done all things well"? Did we keep the commandments?

Alas, of only too many of those who are Catholics in name, it cannot be said that they practise the Christian faith in all things.

It is true, my dear friends, the Christian faith is exacting. It exacts continued vigilance; it exacts self-denial and mortification. "If any man will come after me," says Jesus, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. XVI, 24). Yet, while the demands of the Christian faith are great, the reward for the faithful Christian is even greater.

2. "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

The reward of the faithful Christian is eternal life, ever-

lasting bliss, whereof St. Paul says, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor. II, 9).

And Christian faith is rewarded even in this life. True, our faith is beset with hardship and self-denial, but the Christian who takes for his model Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith (Heb. XII, 2), and tries to walk in His steps, finds his reward within himself, for he enjoys the peace which the world cannot give nor take away. "Much peace have they that love thy law," says the Psalmist (CXVIII, 165), "and to them there is no stumbling-block." The faithful Christian looks up to heaven and cries: "Abba, Father" (Rom. VIII, 15). He is satisfied with the dispensations of Providence, he fears no one and trusts in the Lord: he is not cast down by tribulation and distress, nor is he even afraid of death and eternity: he sees in death the messenger of peace, who comes to conduct him to a better world. This is the reward of the true Christian here on earth, but God will give him an even greater reward, the everlasting, blessed life.

Jesus Christ promised: "Your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. V, 12), and "The just shall go into life everlasting" (Ibid. XXV, 46). He now repeats this promise: "I will give thee the crown of life." Hence our Christian faith will be rewarded with a most glorious reward, with blessed immortality, with an indestructible crown.

This reward, so we may hope, has been received by our departed reverend friend. The Lord called him and said to him: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. XXV, 21). We all shall receive this reward if we are faithful Christians, and true disciples of Christ.

Let us, therefore, strive and struggle, and exert all our strength, lest we forfeit this reward, this indestructible crown of life. What is human life? It is short and insecure, little satisfaction can its possessions, its honours and pleasures, afford the heart. Solomon had the fulness of earthly possessions, and yet he exclaimed: "Vanity of vanities and all is vanity" (Eccl. I, 2). Indeed, were man not created for eternity, were his promised reward not the happiness of heaven, then this earthly life would be truly wretched.

Life here is the beginning, eternity is the completion and perfection. Hence, let us strive for the crown of everlasting life. Let us remember: "Be thou faithful unto death." If we practise our faith, mindful of this word, then the promise of the Saviour will be fulfilled: "I will give thee the crown of life."

And thou, Oh Lord, give to our deceased friend the crown of life! Forgive his weaknesses, for he was human. Give him the crown of life and help us with Thy power, that we too may practise the faith and become deserving of the crown of everlasting glory. AMEN.

CII

BURIALS OF PRIESTS

II

He was beloved of God and men, whose memory is in benediction (Ecclus. XLV, 1).

If I had not known before that this priest was a good, holy, and zealous man, I might learn it by a glance at this assembly, at the general sympathy manifested in the grief of your countenances, and by the tears in so many eyes.

All this proves that he was revered as a father, a benefactor, and a friend of the people of this parish. Yes, indeed, we have buried a worthy servant of God. He combined the qualities of a good shepherd and of a kind and loyal father of his people. He was a pious priest at the altar, in the pulpit a zealous preacher of the gospel, in the confessional a sympathetic adviser, at the sick-bed a loving comforter, in his private life an exalted example for his flock, in brief, a priest who administered all the duties of his office with the greatest compunction, who, like St. Paul, knew no desire other than to win all men for Christ and to save them. To him may truly be applied the praise bestowed on Moses by the Spirit of the Lord: "He was beloved of God and men, whose memory is in benediction."

Truly, dear brethren, the memory of your blessed priest should never fade in your souls, should never depart from your memory, and should remain a blessing for you by inducing you to follow his example.

To make the memory of this excellent priest such a blessing,

you must think of him often, call to mind the wholesome teachings, admonitions, and warnings he gave you during his ministry, and endeavour to put them into practice.

I am sure that he has exhorted you often to trust in God, to trust in Jesus the Son of God, to trust in the help of the Holy Ghost. Remember these exhortations and take them to heart. Trust in God, the heavenly Father, to whom we owe everything that is good and perfect, who has loved us so as to give His only Begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. Trust in Christ, because there is not salvation except in Him, nor can man become blessed in any name but in the Name of Jesus Christ. Trust in the grace of the Holy Ghost, for He helps our weakness; from Him we derive the will to do good, and the power to accomplish it. Do not fear men, they can harm only the body, but fear God, who may condemn you, body and soul, to eternal misery. Love the Lord, for He is Love Supreme, and He alone is truly worthy to be loved. Do not seek happiness here in things that are idle and perishable, but there, where alone it can be found, in God. Love your neighbour for the sake of God, and live with him in harmony and peace: for where there are love, peace, and harmony, there is God, who is the God of love and peace, but where there prevail dissension, discord, and hatred, there is the evil spirit.

Follow, then, the teachings which our deceased friend has given in general, but do also zealously as he advised each of you individually. Upon you, dear parents, he enjoined the strict supervision over your children, lest these souls should be lost through your fault. "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel," says the Apostle (1. Tim. V, 8). He who is righteous is righteous also in his

own home. How can you raise your children in virtue if you do not set them a good example?

Our departed friend has no doubt taken especial care to enjoin upon the younger members of the parish to preserve modesty, propriety, and chastity, to avoid bad company and the occasion for sin, so as not to be ensnared by seducers. Oh, do not forget these admonitions, lest you lose your most beautiful ornament, your most precious treasure, your innocence and purity of heart!

Our departed friend exhorted you, my dear young children, to be obedient and God-fearing. Hence, preserve his words in your heart and act accordingly. Fear God, and obey your parents!

Let his words of advice be indelibly impressed upon your heart and memory, strive zealously to put them in practice. Thus you will do real honour to the memory of your spiritual father, whose loss you are mourning, and his memory will be a blessing for you. "He was beloved of God and men, whose memory is a benediction."

But there is another duty for you to fulfil for your departed priest: you must pray for the peace of his soul. True, in view of his exemplary life, spent in the exercise of Christian virtue, in the conscientious performance of his duties, and in a careful preparation for death, the hope is warranted that he has been received into the kingdom of the blessed; but, my friends, where is a man whose life is so pure as to stand the scrutiny of Him who detects flaws even in His angels?

Let us offer, for his eternal rest, the fruits of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at the same altar where he offered the Holy Sacrifice so often for you. Let us pray for him here, where he has prayed so many times for you. Let us pray.

CIII

BURIALS OF PRIESTS

III

Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me (Apoc. XXII, 12).

A faithful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, who has borne patiently the burden and the heat of the day, has been called to his reward. He has found his rest in the very cemetery where he has given the last blessing to so many others who died before him. The thought of the life, and the all too early death of this priest of God fills our hearts with sadness.

Our divine Saviour once said: "The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. IX, 37–38). Here there is a zealous labourer taken away. An untiring worker he was, for the salvation of souls. His conscientious care included the little children, to whom he zealously taught faith and virtue; it included the young people, whom he endeavoured to warn against the dangers of the world and against its snares. You all witnessed his ardour in preaching the divine Word from the pulpit. With scrupulous zeal he followed St. Paul's admonition: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke, in all patience and doctrine." In the confessional he worked indefatigably for the conversion of souls, urging on them the words of the Apostle: "Be reconciled to God."

Of utmost importance is the moment when the Christian departs from this life; then the word of the Holy Writ is

fulfilled: "Where the tree has fallen, there it remains lying." For this reason this faithful servant of the Lord hastened at any time, day and night, to the side of those dangerously sick, to comfort them, to strengthen their patience, to turn their hearts toward God, to kindle in their souls the spark of repentance and love of God, so that their death might be holy.

His favourite place was before the Most Holy Sacrament. There he laid his supplications at the feet of Jesus, there he commended the souls entrusted to him to the love and mercy of Jesus, and to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin. There he prayed for you, my dear people, and for the entire Church.

Thus he worked, unremittingly, in the vineyard of the Lord for the salvation of souls, but he did not neglect his own salvation, lest, in the words of the Apostle, he might lose his own soul whilst preaching to others.

His life was edifying, and so was his death. Would that we all had his patience in sufferings, his resignation in God's holy Will!

We have lost much by the death of this good priest. You feel it deeply; hence your grief, your tears. But, my beloved, this priest will live, although he is dead. The seed he has sown will still spring up after his death; what he has planted will grow, thrive, and bring forth fruit. Keep his memory alive. You can do it best by obeying the words he has spoken to you, by walking the path he has shown you. Thank God for the blessing that he left in your parish, preserve this blessing.

The departed is now, so we may hope, in heaven. A faithful servant, he was recalled by the Lord from the burden of the day, to receive his reward. On him the promise of the divine Lord has been fulfilled: "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me."

This faithful labourer is gone to rest; he has entered into the joy of his Lord, whom he served so faithfully. Yet, of

the priest who has been set over much, much will be demanded. God's judgment is severe. Hence, dear friends, in your prayers do not forget him, who daily remembered you in his prayer, and in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Show that you are really his friends, do not forget him, visit his grave now and then. Let us now commend his soul to the mercy of God.

CIV

FOR THE BURIAL OF A TEACHER

As every man has received grace, ministering the same, one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1. PET. IV, 10).

DEAR friends, the order in the kingdom of God is that one must minister to the other, not because of earthly reward, but because of Him "who is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister," and "who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. II, 8). It is not so much the magnitude of the service that counts, but the good faith in which the service is rendered, and loyalty. Without fear of contradiction I may say of our departed friend, that in his profession as teacher he ministered to this community faithfully and to the best of his ability. Faithfulness is more than talent, ability cannot replace faithfulness. He was faithful in his duties and laboured hard to impart useful knowledge to the children, to make of them honourable men and good Christians. He was no less conscientious in fulfilling his duties to his family. And faithful as he was to the community and to his family, so faithful was he to God, whose commandments were the rule of his life. Thus he set a good example to his family and pupils, and we all lose in him a true friend, who was to us an example in righteousness. Hence we may hope that the Lord has given him the reward promised to faithful servants: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Apoc. II, 10). Our departed friend little expected that his grave would be dug so soon. Nor do we know whose turn will be next. Hence take to heart the warning: "As every man hath received the gift, even so min-

ister the same to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

This admonition applies to all of us, young or old: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same, one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The things we acquire by industry and skill will not accompany us before the judgment of the Lord; we shall be accompanied only by our works, the works which we practised for the love of God and for the sake of Christ, and evil ones, done in the service of sin. The good deeds will bring us eternal life, the others eternal damnation.

Let us all be faithful stewards of the manifold graces which have been bestowed upon us by God, so that we may work out our salvation: let us minister one to another for the sake of Christ, each with the gifts he has received. Would that we all could say: "Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents: behold, I have gained other five over and above," and then hear in reply: "Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. XXV, 20, 21). Let us pray for the deceased.

CV

FOR THE BURIAL OF A PHYSICIAN

In vain dost thou multiply medicines, there shall be no cure for thee (Jer. XLVI, 11).

"The Most High has given knowledge to men that he may be honoured in his wonders. By these he shall cure and shall allay their pains" (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 6). Our departed brother has practised the medical profession amongst us for many years; he has cured many a disease, allayed many pains, yet, though he kept away death from many thresholds, he had to succumb to death himself. "The Most High," says Holy Writ, "has created medicines but of the earth," but He did not give us a remedy for death. Our brother, who prolonged many a life with healing medicines, had finally to confess: "In vain dost thou multiply medicines, there shall be no cure for thee." He who helped many others to an old age had to bow to the power of death in the prime of his own life.

"For God made not death, neither has he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things, that they might be, and he made the nations of this earth for health, and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor kingdom of hell upon earth. For justice is perpetual and immortal" (Wisd. I, 13–15). In sanctity and justice He created the first of human kind, and had they remained just they would have remained immortal; but they sinned, and through sin death came into the world. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. VI, 23). "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin, death, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned" (Rom. V, 12).

This explains, my dear friends, why there is no physician in this world able to cure all diseases, able to finally defeat death, inasmuch as he cannot remove the cause of disease and death, which is sin. "But fear not," exclaims St. Augustine, "all thy diseases shall be cured. They are powerful, but thy physician is even more powerful." To the Almighty no sickness is past cure, and for the purpose of healing mankind, stricken in its entirety with the disease of sin, there descended to earth the divine Physician, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who delivered us from sin by His death on the Cross, who thus overcame death and brought us life and immortality. Of Him the Prophet Isaias foretold: "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: but he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isa. LIII, 4–5). And Christ Himself says: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me, although he shall be dead, shall live. And everyone that liveth and believeth in me shall not die for ever" (John XI, 25, 26). "For by a man came death, and by a man came resurrection of the dead, and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1. Cor. XV, 21, 22).

Such, my friends, is our comfort and hope in sickness, and in all sufferings incidental to this earthly life, as well as in death, to which we are all subject. No man, be he ever so clever, can deliver us from death, because he cannot remove the cause, which is sin. Only Christ, the Almighty Physician, can deliver us, and He does so. He heals us of sin, He restores to us the life of grace. He has overcome death, and, on the day of judgment, He will rouse our bodies to everlasting life.

With this comfort and in this hope died our departed friend, duly prepared for a good death. Let us thank our Lord for having created medicines for the welfare of men; let us give

glory to the Most High for giving to men the knowledge and skill to advise us in illness. Let us respect our health; let us preserve it with care, and not ruin it by a reckless or even a sinful life. "Turn away from sin, and order thy hands aright, and cleanse thy heart from all offence; for he that sinneth in the sight of his Maker shall fall into the hands of the physician" (Ecclus. XXXVIII, 10, 15).

Our departed friend was an honour to his profession; he was skilful and conscientious; but even greater praise for him is the tribute of tears devoted to his memory by many a poor man, many a poor woman, who can testify to the kindness of heart of this good man. Let us pray.

CVI

FOR THE BURIAL OF A BUILDER

In my Father's house there are many mansions (John XIV, 2).

Indeed, my friends, there are many mansions in the house of the heavenly Father, not built by a mortal builder, not made with mortal hands. And the life in these heavenly mansions is happy beyond all expression; there are rest and peace, joy and security. "Death shall be no more," says St. John, "nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow; for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. XXI, 4).

Even if the house we occupy in this life can withstand rain and flood and the winds, there will come a day when we have to leave it. They carry our body out of this house and bury it. "And only the grave remaineth ," says holy Job (XVII, 1).

Since then, my dear friends, we must soon leave our earthly mansion, since nothing remains for us here in the end but the grave, must we not do our utmost to become worthy of admittance into the mansions of our Father in heaven? St. Chrysostom complains that "to obtain a house here, with plenty of light and air, we will readily undergo trouble and great expense. How much more does it behoove us to exert all our powers to obtain a mansion in heaven, radiant in infinite brightness?"

But we are often slothful: we exert ourselves to acquire fine mansions here below, but we are doing nothing to obtain even an humble place in heaven.

What must we do, then, to gain admittance into the eternal mansions? The Saviour tells us: "Make unto you friends of

the mammon of iniquity, that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings" (Luke XVI, 9). This means: Use of your abundance to do works of love and charity: these good works will be your friends and procure for you the admittance into the heavenly mansions. The Lord says: "Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. VII, 21). And again: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Ibid. XIX, 17). Here you see, my friends, what is required for the reception into the everlasting mansions. We must do the will of the Lord, as bidden by our conscience and by His commandments; we must faithfully perform all our duties; we must avoid sin, and practise good works pleasing to God. If we do this, then we are building for ourselves a house that is not temporal, but eternal.

To become worthy of admittance into the heavenly mansions, you must try to sanctify your present life by virtue and the fear of God, by works of love and charity, set a good example to the members of your house. Be zealous in giving glory and praise to God, thus converting your home into a temple of the Lord: then you will become worthy of the eternal house of God.

We may hope that our departed brother has been received into the eternal mansions, because he was righteous, a faithful husband, a good father, and a devout Christian. He endured his sufferings with great patience, and died resigned to the holy Will of God. Let us pray for the peace of his soul.

CVII

FOR THE BURIAL OF A SOLDIER

Dear friends, it has pleased the Lord to recall your comrade from this world. Death unexpectedly invaded your ranks. It is a great shock to see a young man in the prime of his life overcome by a painful disease, to see his vitality sapped in the sick-room, to see him die far from his home and folks. He was a good and faithful comrade, a good soldier, conscientious in the performance of his duties, and much respected and beloved: who then can stand at the early grave of this fine fellow without sadness and pity?

But the Lord has so decreed. In His wisdom He giveth life or death, whatever is best for us. Since Christ is our life, then to die is our gain; we may hope that our departed friend has found mercy. He valiantly fought the good fight, under the flag of the Cross, and now he has been crowned with victory.

Let his death serve as a solemn caution, especially for you, his comrades. Be on your guard, lest the enemy, the destroyer of life, death, take you by surprise. You are likely to encounter death any day. Death laughs at weapons and shells, at ramparts and trenches, at the science of war and strategy. General and private, millionaire and beggar, are lawful prey to death. Death is the invincible warrior, and we all shall become its victims — one sooner, another later.

Hence, be on your guard lest you be taken unawares: be always prepared for death. Our friend here has by a holy preparation snatched victory from death, taken away its

sting, and has entered eternal life and glory. Christ says: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John VIII, 12). "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, although he shall be dead, shall live: and everyone that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die for ever" (Ibid. XI, 25, 26). He warns you to-day most earnestly to abandon the service of the world and sin, and to enlist under His banner, to follow Him, to become a soldier of Christ. He asks of you to put on the armour of God, the breastplate of justice, to take unto you the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect (Eph. VI, 13–17). Oh, do not despise this armour! It is the only one to make you invincible. And if then your implacable foe, death, should come, and strike you down, then all it can do is to kill your mortal body, but your immortal soul shall rest in God's care. Death will then be the means to take you from the struggle to victory, to the glorious freedom of the children of God, to life everlasting. Hence, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, do manfully and be strengthened. Let all your things be done in charity" (1. Cor. XVI, 13, 14). "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must get saved" (Acts IV, 12), but the name of Jesus Christ, blessed in all eternity.

May our dear, departed brother rest peacefully in his grave! The Lord be gracious to him and grant him a blessed resurrection on the day of judgment. Amen. Let us pray.

CVIII

BURIALS OF OFFICIALS

I

Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven (Matt. V, 12).

The deceased, at whose grave we are assembled, was, as you all know, for many years a public official; he endeavoured to perform faithfully both, the duties of his office and his Christian duties. If he could talk to us now, from the grave, he would probably warn us of the ingratitude of the world; he would urge us not to serve the world, not to rely on worldly reward, but to serve in the first place God, whose faithful servants are richly rewarded in heaven. Indeed, the world will often leave unrewarded the most meritorious works, whereas the Lord bountifully rewards any work done for love of Him, even the smallest. Even if the world does reward its servants, the reward is often not in proportion to the service: whilst the Lord abundantly rewards every man for his good works.

The world is ungrateful. This is a daily experience. Great services in this world are soon forgotten, if not entirely overlooked. Let someone take an active interest in the welfare of their fellow-beings, be it as a matter of duty, or moved by Christian charity, he will at once meet with malicious criticism and insinuations of self-seeking. Moreover, the world is not always *able* to give adequate reward.

It is different with the Lord. Those who serve Him, who keep His commandments, who perform all their duties in His honour, who patiently endure all visitations — they need

not fear that their services will be forgotten. The Saviour assures us that He will not leave unnoticed and unrewarded even the drink of water we give the thirsty in the spirit of charity. He keeps account of all our acts and steps in His service, that they may be rewarded in due time; He is pleased even with little things done for the love of Him; He will reward the mere good intention, if the strength to carry it out be lacking.

The servant of the Lord need not be afraid to reap ingratitude, for the Lord is just and rewards the good just as unfailingly as He punishes the evil. He has the power to reward His servants superabundantly. "The Lord is rich unto all that call upon him," says the Apostle (Rom. X, 12), and St. John Chrysostom says: "God is infinitely rich: the ocean of His bounty is immense and inexhaustible; He could create at any moment a world of heavenly and temporal possessions with which to reward His servants; even if He had as many servants as there are sands on the beach, and a hundred thousand times as many, He still would and could not lack the means to reward each and all these numerous servants superabundantly." Hence, the servant of the Lord is certain of a bountiful reward for everything which he has done and will do for the love of God.

2. The world, furthermore, is not able to reward its servants adequately for their work. Consider what a man must put up with to gain the favour of the world and to keep it. How he must work in the sweat of his brow, how he must humble himself, how much vexation and abuse he must bear. At best he gets an earthly reward, lasting not longer than his life. But too often he reaps ignominy rather than reward. After his death his services are soon forgotten, and he will pass into oblivion. "His memory hath perished with a noise" (Ps. IX, 7), with the ringing of the bells at his funeral.

Quite different is the reward for the servants of the Lord: it is great, immense, as great as the infinite God Himself, for He says: "I am thy reward exceedingly great" (Gen. XV, 1). Hence, the Saviour says: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." The greatness of this reward, the joy and bliss of the Lord's servants in heaven, are beyond the power of human imagination. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor. II, 9). The Lord rewards His servants even here on earth, giving them that sweet joy and the inner peace arising out of the faithful fulfilling of His commandments, and out of the consciousness of having done one's duty: a joy and a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. "Much peace they have that love thy law, and to them there is no stumbling-block" and "a secure mind is like a continual feast" (Prov. XVI, 15).

My dear friends, once a faithful servant of a mighty king was on his death-bed and he begged of the king a respite of only fifteen minutes, that he might make his confession, but the king was compelled to admit: "This is beyond my power." This is a grace of God. Our deceased friend had this grace to receive the holy rites of the Church and to prepare for a good death. Whether we also shall be granted this grace, we cannot know; death comes stealthily, like a thief at night. Hence, let us be prepared, by serving not the world, which pays with ingratitude, but the Lord, who will reward us superabundantly for every service rendered unto Him.

To gain earthly possessions we spare no effort and exertion; should we not even more exert ourselves to merit the glorious reward that is in store for God's faithful servants? "An everlasting labour were not too much to gain an everlasting reward," says St. Augustine. But the Lord does not exact so

much of us: He requires of us only to serve Him faithfully for the short time of our life. He demands nothing further of us than to keep His commandments: "and his commandments are not heavy" (John V, 3). He requires us to avoid sin and to practise virtue. And if this should ever be hard for us let us raise our eyes and hearts to heaven, and find encouragement and comfort in the words of the Saviour: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." Let us pray for the departed.

CIX

BURIALS OF OFFICIALS

II

All flesh shall fade as grass and as the leaf that springeth out on a green tree. Some grow and some fall off: so is the generation of flesh and blood: one cometh to an end, and another is born. Every work that is corruptible shall fail in the end: and the worker therefore shall go with it (Ecclus. XIV, 18–20).

In these words of Holy Scripture, my dear friends, the transientness of man and of all his works is correctly described. That this fate is awaiting all of us is the lesson we should take from this mournful occasion. Our earthly career may be long or short; with each day, with each hour, we shorten the distance between us and the end of our journey, when our soul will leave its earthly mansion, our vitality will fade away, our eyes will close, our lips be sealed in silence, and our body will become the prey of dissolution. "All flesh shall fade as grass and as the leaf that springeth out on a green tree." Then our earthly work and doing is ended, once and for ever. No longer can then the scientist gather knowledge, no longer can the professional man make use of his experience, no longer can the official exert his power, no longer can the righteous labour for a higher grade of perfection, and, alas, no longer can man do penance for his sins. "Every work that is corruptible shall fail in the end: and the worker thereof shall go with it."

At our death it will be a case of "All flesh shall fade as grass and as the leaf that springeth out on a green tree. Some grow and some fall off: so is the generation of flesh and

blood: one cometh to an end, and another is born." Nothing that we should have done, and have failed to do, can be done in the hereafter: the night has come, when no man can work, nor care for his salvation. Earthly pleasures, too, are then gone for ever. For the dead the day of work is over, there is no longer sowing time for those asleep in the grave. Hence, my dear friends, let us rightly value this life and make proper use of it, while it is yet ours. Let us do penance for our sins, let us do good deeds, and work out our salvation, ere that night cometh when no man can work.

This aspect of death is sad, but there is another aspect; death also makes an end to all troubles, afflictions, and sufferings of this earth, in which all men are sharing, though in different measure. For some the road leading to their destination is smooth, for others it is a hard one to travel, yet everyone will learn, by his own experience, that the happiness of earth is neither lasting nor perfect, and many of those in this life are staggering under a heavy burden, and in danger of breaking down. These sufferings last to the grave only; in death all complaints cease, grief and disappointment are at an end. Happy he who can look back to a good life, and take into the hereafter a treasure of good works; for death is followed by the judgment, which will render to everyone according to his deeds. Hence, it is written: "With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death, he shall be blessed" (Ecclus. I, 13). "The just shall live for evermore, and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High. Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord" (Wisd. V, 16, 17). Inasmuch as everyone of us has to carry his cross, let us carry it with patience, and, whenever down-hearted, let us take courage in the thought: soon there will be rest after this toil,

and peace after this struggle. But to insure to us this rest and eternal peace, let us prepare now, whilst there is time, for a good death by a good life and by penance.

We may hope that our departed brother has been rewarded at the hand of the Lord with the crown of glory, for his labours in the service of God and of the neighbour, for the loyal love he devoted to his wife and children, and for his many charitable deeds; our hope is warranted because he died a holy death, after receiving the holy rites of the Church. Let us now pray for the rest of his soul.

CX

BURIALS OF OFFICIALS

III

I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience (Apoc. II, 2).

The angel of Death makes no distinction between the different conditions of life and of age. *When* he will come to knock at our door is hidden to our mind. Hence, we should be ready at any hour. The thread of life of some is cut off suddenly and unexpectedly; in other instances the separation of soul and body takes place slowly. Some go through the gate of death quickly, others die a slow death. Some die with hardly any pain, whilst others must drain the bitter cup of intense agony. Who may tell what *our* manner of death will be?

Our departed brother died a speedy but good death: the sorrow of the family is shared by the whole community, which has lost in him one of its best citizens. His active life is now concluded, and, in giving thought to his achievements I am reminded of the words of the Lord: "I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience."

Since the Lord is watching our doings, and since our works will follow us into eternity, the question is proper at this grave: What were the works of the deceased, what has he done? His unceasing loyalty in administering his office is known, also that he never grew weary of his work while able to do it. We see him before us, studying and aiming at broadening his knowledge; we see him giving others the benefit of his vast knowledge, always in a modest and amiable way, free from conceit and overbearing. We know how ready

he was to further everything good and noble. We know his exemplary life in his home circle. He, with his high-minded and gentle wife, made their home a truly Christian home: he instilled piety and the fear of God in the hearts of his children; he set them a good example by attending regularly the church and the Sacraments. The Lord's commandments were his inviolable law of life.

I cannot presume to review here his entire life, nor could I give higher praise than is contained in the mentioned qualities of this truly good man.

The Lord says: "I know thy patience." Sacrifice and patience our friend practised all through his life. He was not exempt from great worries, nor from adversities, yet he was never heard to make bitter complaint. In his vocation he encountered many difficulties, without ever losing his love and interest for his task. Visited with physical sufferings of various description, he endured them with Christian fortitude and patience, never murmuring against the Will of the Lord. Thus he gave proof of his great resignation, and there is One above us who will say to him: "I know thy patience."

He has been taken away from the land of the living. He has appeared before his Judge, before whose throne we too shall stand in that dread hour to come for each of us. We hope the Lord has received him in grace. We hope, furthermore, that the Lord has said to him: "I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience. . . . Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord, good and faithful servant, I will give thee the crown of life."

He has ascended, we remain here, not knowing at what time the Lord shall call us. Let us hope that we also shall be prepared. Let us watch and pray, and insure for ourselves a blessed death by leading a Christian life. Now we shall pray for the deceased.

CXI

BURIAL OF A SERVANT

Stay me not, because the Lord hath prospered my way: send me away that I may go to my master (GEN. XXIV, 56).

THUS spoke Eliezer, Abraham's faithful servant, to the mother and brother of Rebecca when they desired to retain him. These words may be well applied to him whom we have just laid to rest. He was a faithful servant, enjoying the confidence of his master. "Stay me not," said he to those who would try to keep him from doing his duty. "Stay me not," said he to those who would lure him to the way of sin and wrongdoing. With the grace of God he resisted evil. After long years of faithful service his position became one of confidence, and he was treated like one of the family rather than like a servant. He was satisfied and happy in his position, which he occupied so long in honesty, probity, and loyalty. And again, when he realized that death was near, he said: "Stay me not, because the Lord has prospered my way: let me depart that I may go to my master." Indeed, the Lord has prospered his way to the heavenly home; He gave him the grace to be resigned to His holy Will, to find forgiveness for his sins, and to receive the Holy Viaticum. Now he has gone to his Eternal Master, whose Will was his law.

In life he heeded the Apostle's exhortation: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your lords, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart as to Christ: not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men, but as the servant of Christ doing the will of God from the

heart" (Eph. VI, 6). And since in all things he did the Will of God we may hope that the Lord has said to him: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. XXV, 23).

Our departed friend is happy. Let this be a sweet consolation to you in your sorrow.

We all, my brethren, are servants, namely, servants of the Lord, and it is also required of us that we be faithful in our service. "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but that thou fear the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways, and love him, and serve the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and keep the commandments of the Lord and his ceremonies" (Deut. X, 12, 13). If we have not done so, we cannot hope, should death surprise us, to enter in the joy of the Lord; on the contrary, we must fear to hear the awful sentence: "The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hence, let us do penance whilst there is time for it; let us prove ourselves faithful servants, serving God with all our heart; lest we forfeit the reward promised by God to His faithful servants. Now let us pray that this reward be given to our departed friend.

CXII

BURIALS OF THE POOR

I

I am going the way of all flesh: take thou courage, and show thyself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord, thy God (3. Kings II, 3).

When the God-fearing Tobias felt that his death was nigh, he gave to his son this admonition: "Fear not, my son: we lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God and depart from all sin and do that which is good" (Tob. IV, 23). Tobias had through adversity become poor, but he had saved one thing, his greatest treasure — his fear of God and his confidence in God — and this treasure he desired to bequeath to his son, to comfort him in the hour of parting.

Happy the man, who, when dying, can leave this comfort to those dearest to him, who can leave them such a legacy! You, my dear people, are in a similar position. Your earthly provider and protector, your father, has departed from this land of want and worry; he has gone to the land of the righteous, where there is no want; he has left you orphans, but, like the pious Tobias, your father has bequeathed you things more precious than wealth, namely, an honest name, the fear of God, and a good father's blessing. If you honour this inheritance and make good use of it, you will be rich, no matter what your position, and God will not leave you, neither will He forsake you. But your father has left you another legacy, the legacy of every dying man to his sons. It is the legacy expressed in King David's last words to Solomon: "I am

going the way of all flesh: take thou courage, and show thyself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord, thy God, to walk in his ways and observe his ceremonies, and his precepts and judgments and testimonies, that thou mayest understand all thou dost and whither so ever thou shalt turn thyself" (3. Kings II, 2, 3). Let us contemplate for our comfort and benefit this spiritual legacy of the dead.

1. "I am going the way of all flesh," said David to his son — the way the son would also sooner or later go, the way through the dark gate of death. We are forcibly reminded of our own death when standing at the grave of a departed friend. There we see plainly the confirmation of the words in Holy Writ: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field; the grass is withered and the flower thereof is fallen away" (1. Pet. I, 24). "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" (Heb. XIII, 14). The children of the world, fond of life and dreading death, do not like to listen to such admonitions; yet these admonitions are most beneficial and salutary, because we think too seldom of death, even though always surrounded by death. If someone we love dearly dies a good death, we may rejoice in the certainty that it is within our power to become reunited with him. Take this thought and impress it upon your heart for your consolation and likewise for your counsel.

2. "Walk in the ways of God and be wise. Keep the charge of the Lord, thy God." This is the best possible advice which the dying king could give to Solomon. He does not refer him to earthly possessions, but to the fear of God and to piety. Words spoken by dying persons are very impressive for the human heart, and particularly impressive are the words of a dying father to his children. Those about to die will speak the truth, and these words of David are the truth. Who would not desire to be reunited with our departed

dear ones? But to accomplish this we must live and die in the faith, as they did. Hence, do not let go unheeded the silent admonition of your departed father: "And the world passeth away and the concupiscence thereof, but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever" (1. John II, 17). Keep always in mind the pious example of your father, and let it be a holy spiritual legacy to you, as well as counsel and encouragement.

3. "You are under the care of the Lord." This was the consolation David gave to his son, and no better consolation could he give him, for, as he said on another occasion, "He that dwelleth in the aid of the most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector and my refuge: my God, in him will I put my trust" (Ps. XC, 1, 2).

The feeling of forsakenness of the survivors, who now have to walk alone on their pilgrimage, is the thing which makes death so bitter. Happy we, who know ourselves safe in the protection of the Most High! The comfort which every man who dies in the fear of God will leave to his survivors is: "God will be with you." It is a precious, spiritual legacy, that should wipe away the tears and remove care and anxiety. If you do not forsake the Lord, He will never forsake you, "the Lord is with you if you are with him: if you seek him, you shall find him" (2. Paralip. XV, 2).

Therefore, my children, preserve in your heart the legacy of your dear, departed father, and it will prove your consolation, and your guide to true happiness and salvation. It will make easy your own death, when the hour comes, as it must come. Do not fail to pray often and with fervour for the peace of your father's immortal soul, and let us do this now.

CXIII

BURIALS OF THE POOR

II

But it came to pass that the beggar named Lazarus died and was carried by the angel into Abraham's bosom (Luke XVI, 22).

We are standing, to-day, at the grave of one who, like Lazarus, has been in a lowly position all his life. Wanting in most things, he had one possession which, alas, many of the wealthy have not, namely, a pious and God-fearing mind, and he was patient, and resigned to God's holy Will. This saintly sentiment he proved also in his sickness, receiving repeatedly the holy Sacraments, and preserving his submission to God's holy Will unto the last. Hence, we may hope that his soul, like the soul of Lazarus, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, into heaven. The death of a poor and just man, like this, gives us much food for reflection. Let us meditate on it for the comfort of all of us, and as a lesson and warning for those whom the Lord has blessed with earthly possessions.

1. Poverty is no disgrace when coming from God. God creates rich men and poor men, and He metes with different measures when distributing His goods, according to His wisdom. His Incarnate Son came to earth in poverty and want. He had no place where to lay His head. "For you know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "that, being rich, he became poor for your sake: that through his poverty you might be rich" (2. Cor. VIII, 9).

2. Poverty is no disgrace, if the poor are faithful to God.

Poverty is exposed to many temptations, especially to envy and covetousness towards those blessed with wealth, but, on the other hand, poverty is a protection against even more temptations, temptations that have their origin or occasion in luxurious life and idleness.

3. Poverty is sufficiency, if rich in virtue. There are possessions not dependent on the amount of earthly wealth, and they are the highest and only enduring possessions. It is easier for the poor to acquire these than it is for those of wealth. The peace of God, the fear of God, a life in close communion with God, a mind turned to the eternal reward, care for the salvation of the soul, which is the one thing necessary — all these are riches in God, which any poor man may gain, even the poorest of the poor.

4. Poverty is no misfortune, if leading to God. The death of the righteous is the gate to the glory of heaven, as it was the case with Lazarus, not because he was poor, but because he was God-fearing in his poverty. Death does not seem so dreadful to the poor as it does to the rich. "Oh death, thy sentence is welcome to the man that is in need, and to him whose strength faileth" (Ecclus. XLI, 3). Death brings a relief and change which a poor man, if pious, will often welcome. His earthly toil is then at an end, heavenly bliss begins.

Happy they who have in the love of God gone through the ordeal of poverty on earth. They are rewarded by the Lord with joy and glory in abundance. That this glory be soon the part of our departed brother, let us pray.

CXIV

BURIALS OF UNFORTUNATES

I

Oh death, thy sentence is welcome to the man that is in need, and to him whose strength faileth: who is in a decrepit age, and that is in care about all things, and to the distrustful that loseth patience (Ecclus. XLI, 3, 4).

My brethren, death is often accompanied by profound grief and sorrow, awaited with anxiety and dread. On the other hand, there are those who see in death an angel of peace, earnestly to be wished and longed for. For many a weary pilgrim it is indeed a blessing to be delivered by death from his heavy affliction. Thus says the Holy Scripture: "Oh death, thy sentence is welcome to the man that is in need, and to him whose strength faileth: who is in decrepit age, and that is in care about all things, and to the distrustful that loseth patience."

Death, indeed, becomes a visible blessing for man (1) if his mind becomes disarranged. The greatest misfortune that can befall man in this life is the serious impairment of his mental faculties. In such a condition death becomes a blessing, delivering the poor, obscured spirit from its awful condition, and leading it out of its night of reason to the heavenly brightness.

Death, furthermore, is a blessing (2) when there is no relief possible in severe suffering. Medical science cannot help in all cases, and for some unfortunates there is no other prospect but to suffer misery for the rest of their natural lives. In such extreme cases, when the sufferer is beyond all

hope of improvement and recovery, then, of course, death becomes a relief.

Death is also a blessing (3) when decrepit old age makes life a burden. After a long journey the traveller longs for rest, and he who has borne the burden of the day wishes for the evening to come, when all work ceases. It is a great gift of the Lord to be granted a peaceful old age, free from care. But if the mind is outlived by the body, when the aged grow dull in mind, when life is deprived of clear consciousness, and becomes merely a slow process of exhausting the physical strength, then the old person is a burden to himself, then his death will be a blessing for him. It is a sad fate to outlive one's usefulness. Happy, then, the weary traveller when relieved by the angel of peace of his fetters, and carried into the eternal country! In this case to die is to gain in all respects.

My dear brethren, we who are spared all these evils, that make death desirable, owe a debt of deepest gratitude to Almighty God. Let us prove our gratitude by practising charity towards the poor, the wretched, the unfortunates, and trying to make their hard lot more endurable. Let us make proper use of our faculties by walking in the fear of God, by keeping the commandments, and by endeavouring to become rich in virtues and in meritorious deeds; then, no matter when death shall overtake us, it will be a blessing for us too, because it will take us into our eternal country, where we shall be rewarded for our good works. Now let us pray for our departed brother, that he may be received into the kingdom of glory.

CXV

BURIALS OF UNFORTUNATES

II

I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue (Ps. XXXVIII, 2).

My dear friends, at no time is man more inclined to listen to the truth about the hereafter than when death furnishes him with an object lesson of the transientness of all things, and when his heart is in want of consolation. The death of our departed friend affords occasion for special consideration, because some days before his death he lost the power of speech by an apoplectic stroke. It is always a great visitation to become suddenly dumb, but when so quickly followed by death there is the added misfortune of being rendered unable to put one's earthly affairs in order before dying, of being unable to confess one's sins in the usual way, and of being unable to speak words of admonition and blessing to the family. One of the many blessings which we do not duly appreciate in life is the gift of speech. It will be to our benefit to give some thought to this great gift, and to the manner in which this occasion should induce you to use it.

1. David said: "I spoke with my tongue" to give praise and glory to the Lord. You, too, dear friends, may yet speak with your tongues, speak of the benefits you received from the departed; go then and speak to the Lord, and thank Him for these benefits, because it was His will and grace that made them possible.

A good father, a faithful mother, are a great blessing for children, but we often have a poor memory for benefits re-

ceived. In fact, no benefits are sooner forgotten than those received from parents. Do not become guilty of such ingratitude. Remember the words your father spoke, when he still had the power of speech: remember his admonitions and his prayers in your behalf. Remember them, and honour his memory by making them your rule of life.

2. May our tongue also speak the prayer of David: "Oh Lord, make me know my end and what is the number of my days, that I may know what is wanting in me." Man easily becomes hardened to many things, even to the thought of death. Soldiers are an instance, but also many of those in peaceful walks of life. But tell me what would happen to your soul if death should suddenly strike you? Then you will stand before your Judge and give an accounting of all your works, even of secret thoughts and idle words. The world often jests at death, but if you value your soul do not be so frivolous as to trifle with death. Death is a serious matter, involving eternal glory or eternal perdition. Hence, pray daily with David to the Lord, that He may fill your hearts with salutary thoughts about death, watch your thoughts, words, and deeds, beware of sin, practise good works, and thus prepare for a good death.

3. David said: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." This warns us to beware of sins frequently committed with the tongue.

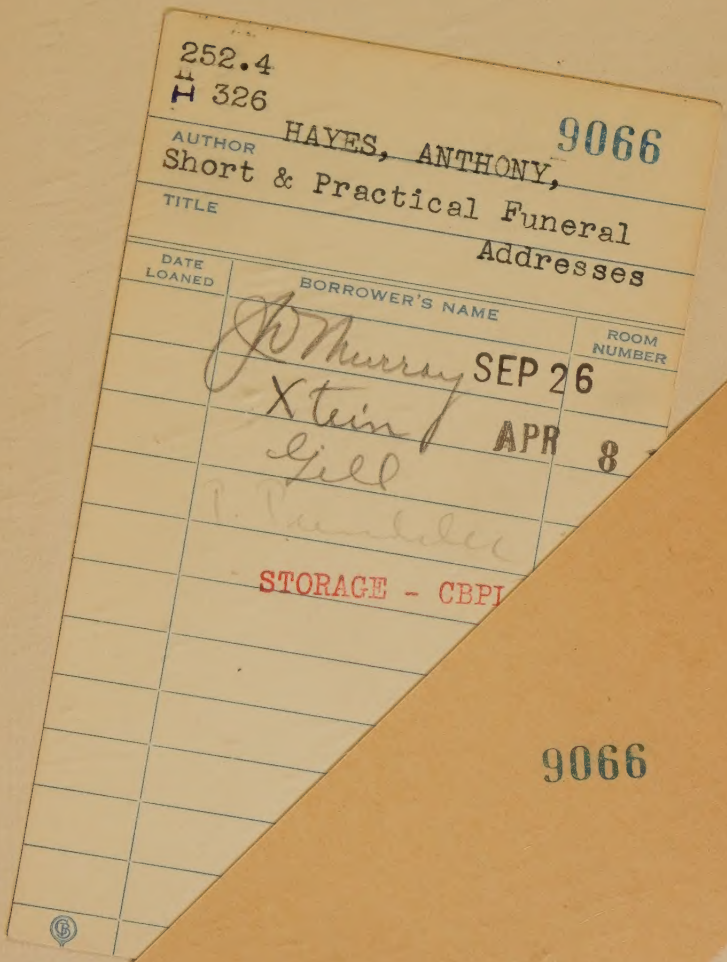
In the sad fate of our departed brother we do not see a punishment, but rather a severe visitation, but it would be a deserved chastisement for those who habitually sin with their tongue and seduce others to sin.

St. James speaks of the great power of the tongue in these words: "For in many things we all offend. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. He is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body. For if we put bits

into the mouths of horses, that they may obey us and we turn about their whole body. Behold also ships, whereas they are great, and are driven by strong winds, yet are they turned about with a small helm, whithersoever the force of the governor willeth. Even so the tongue is indeed a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how small a fire kindleth a great wood! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, which defileth the whole body, and inflameth the wheel of our nativity, being set on fire by hell" (III, 2–6).

Therefore, take heed to your ways, lest you sin with your tongue. Do not use your tongue for cursing, nor for slandering, nor libelling, nor for lying and unkind sayings, nor unchaste words. Use your tongue for the edification of your neighbour, for the confession of your sins, for praising and thanking God, and for praying. The Lord will then hear your sighs in death, even though you may not be able to speak with the tongue.

We may hope that the Lord has heard the penitent prayer which the deceased spoke, in his heart, if not with his tongue, and in such cases sins are remitted through the Holy Sacrament of Extreme Unction. May peace everlasting be his part! Let us pray.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